THE

LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1950.—VOL. LXXV.] FOR THE WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 15, 1900. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

JOHN AKERMAN GAZED UPON THE STILL FEATURES AND GLAZED EYES OF CUTHBERT HOWARD.

THE TRAGEDY OF LOVE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

MRS. PERCIVAL was a widow, her husband, a well-to-do farmer in Ludlington, having died when she was but a wife of a year, leaving her with a babe of barely a month old, and an accumulation of debts extending over such a length of time that she quite shuddered, when his affairs were wound up, to find how little remained of the money she hoped to have had to keep herself and little daughter from actual want.

It was then that Lady Millicent Devaine's baby was born, and the mother, always delicate, after a few days, in which the lamp of life flickered, before it went out for ever, died, her last request being that Marion Percival should be brought to her bedside before her eyes closed in their last long sleep.

She had been maid to her ladyship previous to her marriage—the wedding with John Percival being celebrated within the walls of Ludlington Abbey at the express wish and expense of her former mistress.

"I think you are making a mistake, Marion," she said; "but nevertheless you have been a valued servant to me, and I feel I cannot do too much for you," and Lady Millicent's generosity it was that added so many to the pretty things the girl had collected from time to time for the ornamentation of her future home.

But those who succeeded her did not turn out a success, Mrs. Osbrey, the housekeeper, saying no one ever would, and consequently Marion spent almost as much of her short married life at the Abbey as she did at her own house.

It was only a short walk across the fields; and as she said, although John was all that could be desired in the way of a husband, she never felt so much at home as when beneath her ladyship's roof. And when Lady Millicent was laid to rest in the family vault, no one shed such bitter tears, not even Lord Devaine himself, as Marion did. So when she took the baby, named after her mother, to her pretty cottage to be reared with her own, according to that mother's last wish, she scarcely knew which held the first place in her heart—that or her own infant Mabel.

"Most unfortunate it wasn't a boy," was all his lordship said, when looking on his baby girl in Marion's arms previous to its leaving the Abbey—a circumstance which was a far greater source of unhappiness to him than his wife's early death, he looking upon that event as a kind of retribution which came to her for having brought a daughter into the world.

After that, Cuthbert Devaine apparently ignored the child's existence, so far that he knew the quarterly cheque was always sent through his lawyer to Mrs. Percival; but further than that, his married life with subsequent events seemed to have entirely gone from his memory.

He was seldom at the Abbey except in the

shooting season, when he would fill it with guests, who, from the gossip brought by the servants to Marion's cottage, thoroughly enjoyed themselves; but otherwise she heard nothing, saw nothing of him, and the two children the while growing up together as though they had never had but the one mother.

And then it came to her all at once, little Millicent's schooling, as she told Mrs. Osbrey, who still retained her situation as housekeeper at Lord Devaine's. Didn't she think it was time his lordship was reminded that the Honourable Miss Devaine could not remain all her life beneath her humble roof; and much as she dreaded the parting with her foster-child, still she should not be doing her duty to her or her dead lady did she not see the necessity of her being transplanted to her proper sphere.

"You are quite right, Marion," Mrs. Osbrey replied. "I shall make a point of naming it to his lordship to-morrow. She is but four years old now, but still it's quite time she should be back at the Abbey with a nurse and governess as becomes her station."

So the following morning Lord Devaine was surprised in his library by a servant entering to know if the housekeeper could speak to him.

"Yes, show her in, James," he said, thinking of nothing more important in her visit than a question or two with regard to the number of guests that might be expected in the ensuing week, when October came in; and had a bomb-shell exploded at his feet, Guthbert Devaine could scarcely have experienced a greater surprise than when she explained to him the true purport of the desired interview.

"Dear me, Osbrey," he said. "Of course, as you say, the child must leave her foster-mother's roof, but where on earth you will put her, or what you will do with her, Heaven only knows! It is very inconvenient—extremely inconvenient—just as the house will be filled with my guests," and his lordship folded and unfolded his white hands, looking steadfastly into the fire all the time, as though the bright flame could help him to solve the enigma how, in Ludlington Abbey, with its thirty odd rooms, he could find space for a baby girl of four years.

"Surely, my lord, the young lady is entitled to her share of her father's mansion!" Mrs. Osbrey answered in a nettled tone, which brought the hot blood to her master's face; a sense of shame causing him to see, for the first time, how even his servants were more jealous of his daughter's rights than he had been.

A week after and the little Millicent left Marion, who shed copious tears at parting with her, the while Mabel questioned, with wondering blue eyes, why they were taking "'ittle Milly away," the child almost screaming herself into convulsions when, in place of Mrs. Percival, two strange nurses administered to her wants in the rooms set apart for her in his lordship's house.

Mrs. Osbrey carried her in her arms to her father's library the morning after her arrival—for she it was who had soothed her in her baby grief, and the little arms were encircled lovingly around her neck, the while her head with its wealth of golden curls rested on her motherly shoulder. And during that time she would cast furtive glances, half frightened, half curious, to where Lord Devaine sat. Not till the housekeeper, who had placed her on the floor, and to whose dress she clung, telling her to go and kiss papa, would she move a step.

"Are you 'eally my papa!" she asked; then lifting her eyes, her mother's eyes, to his face, for the first time bringing to his memory his beautiful dead wife; and then he took her in his arms, blaming himself for his past neglect, and opening his heart to receive the love of his motherless child.

"And do you love papa!" he asked.

"No, me wants Mabel," was the innocent reply, the tears swelling beneath her eyelids; and when told who Mabel was, his lordship gave orders that there was no reason the children should be separated—years and the difference in their paths through life would do that soon enough. And so the nurses were almost constant visitors with their young charge at the widow's cottage, they being almost as glad to have a chat with Mrs. Percival, retailing all the news from the Abbey, as Millicent and Mabel were to renew their games.

But each year imperceptibly a gap appeared to widen between them, Miss Devaine no sooner leaving the nursery for the schoolroom than she began to learn instinctively the difference in their social position, the more so that the English and French governess, both and each, did not fail to impress the young beauty with a sense of her importance, and the wide gulf which yawned between her and her former playmate.

After that her sojourn on the Continent, where she completed her studies, did not tend to bring them nearer to each other; but a few months passing over her head, and the name almost of the daughter of her foster-mother had faded from her memory.

But with Mabel it was so different, not that she ever blamed Millicent that no message arrived at the Cottage from her. She heard of her from the servants at the Abbey, how beautiful she was grown—on one occasion being shown a "photo" taken in Paris, and she did not seem to wonder that she was forgotten by the heiress of Devaine.

What was she, as she would tell her mother, that a young lady so beautiful, so noble, one day to be presented at Court, should remember her now that she was grown up!

But Marion could not see things in the same light, and when her eyes rested on her own child, no less lovely than his lordship's daughter, she almost rebelled against the fate which had cast their lots in such different places.

She knew it was foolish, even preposterous, that she could expect Miss Devaine to be on the same footing, beneath her roof, as when, as an infant, she took her from her dying mother's arms.

Even Mabel was wiser, young as she was, and was content to be made aware of the movements of her beloved foster-sister, whom she regarded now as so superior to herself, that the fact she had once honoured the Cottage with her baby presence was a reminiscence she ever looked back to with pride.

And then the news came from Mrs. Osbrey, Miss Devaine would be back at the Abbey the week following, and Mabel begged to be allowed to see her, if it were only once, and at a distance.

"You shall see her safe enough, my dear," the housekeeper said. "But five years makes a great difference in all of us, and you must not be disappointed if our young lady, after having been amongst foreigners all that time, scarcely, if the truth were known, bearing a word of English spoken, is quite a different young lady as when she went away! And though, doubtless, you and your mother would never be entirely forgotten by her, still, naturally, your relationships will be on an entirely new footing."

Mabel knew it too, a dry sob catching her breath as she listened to Mrs. Osbrey's words; and then, leaving her and her mother to their own discourse, she went from the room to one above, where she and Millicent had so often slept together, to think it all over, and to wonder if rich ladies ever felt such affection, such love, as their poorer sisters.

CHAPTER II.

The next day Lord Devaine stood on the steps to give welcome to his daughter on her return to the Abbey, a look of admiration passing over his features when, on the carriage driving up, a tall, beautiful girl of eighteen sprang out to meet him.

"You dear, good papa!" she said. "I am so glad to be home once more, and how lovely it all looks!" her eyes wandering to where the spring sun was resting on the velvet turf, and the drooping branches of the stately trees were rich in the green of their new-born leaves. "There is no place like England, and Ludlington Abbey dearer than all." And then she entered the hall, where Mrs. Osbrey came forward to offer a deferential greeting, Millicent eagerly seizing the hands she had almost hesitated to hold out in a friendly grasp.

"Why, you are not a bit altered, Osbrey!" she said; "and when I look round, it seems it is only I who am changed, and I have grown quite old."

"Quite a grown-up young lady, Miss Devaine," Osbrey answered, thinking the while, and how beautiful! Lady Devaine she had thought the most lovely creature she had ever seen, but Miss Millicent was far lovelier than her mother.

"Dinner will be served at seven, my lord," the housekeeper said, in answer to his lordship's question; and then, followed by Blanchette, her French maid, his daughter according to her wish, was shown to her room.

She was wearied with the journey from London, having crossed the Channel but the night previous, and was not sorry to avail herself of Blanchette's services to loosen the coils of her yellow hair; after the refreshing influence of a bath reclining on the sofa until it was time to prepare to meet her father in the drawing-room previous to dinner.

A perfect cup of fragrant tea, like a bouquet, had been sent up to her boudoir. Blanchette, who declared she was dying with hunger, being served with something far more substantial in Mrs. Osbrey's private room, expressing her raptures in respect to the Abbey all through the meal, with such exclamations of enthusiasm that the quiet, matter-of-fact Englishwoman regarded her as if not wholly insane partially so.

But the way in which she afterwards performed her young lady's toilette was a marvel of skill, and it was with a degree of pride he never thought to have experienced that Lord Devaine's eyes rested on the graceful form of his lovely daughter, when shortly after she entered the room where he was awaiting her.

"We dine alone, to-night, my child!" he said, "for I thought you would be too wearied to entertain, on this, your first evening at home."

"Not that so much, dear," she answered, "but don't I want you all to myself, for this once at least, you dear papa!" and placing her white rounded arms, looking like ivory in contrast to her black dress, around his neck, she looked up lovingly into his still handsome face.

"Are there any country families around here likely to call!" she asked after, when together they sat over the dessert. "I almost forget every one," and then she laughed, "that is, if I ever knew them," for in that moment her early childhood recurred to her memory, passed as it had been with nurses and then governesses, few scarcely knowing of her existence.

Lord Devaine raised the glass of wine to his lips, round which his fingers had slightly rested, the unintentional reproof not escaping his notice.

"You were such a child, Mill," he said, "but, of course, now *nous avons changé tout cela*. Your aunt, Lady Augusta Howard, your mother's only sister, has consented to make the Abbey her home—to be not only your chaperon, but a companion to you also. She is a widow now, you must know, with one son in the army, but she sees little of him, and, from what I hear, the less the better, for his visits, rare as angels', are made with but the one resolve, to induce her to draw her purse-strings to pay his debts, which she has done already on more occasions than I can name."

"Is she very old!" Miss Devaine asked, apparently not savouring the idea of being constantly under the espionage of an elderly lady.

"Old! no; she was but a year the senior of your poor mother, and will, I feel sure, fill her place towards yourself. At the same time, I am certain you cannot fail to love her."

"And Mabel Percival, papa, my foster-sister! Does she still live with her mother at the same cottage!"

"They are still there," his lordship replied. "Mabel is considered the belle of the neighbourhood; but there is no mistake, she has grown into a most lovely girl, and the envy, I expect, of a great many of the young people, who will not be sorry when she is removed from their paths by matrimony."

"Is she engaged, then!" his daughter asked,

feeling no little interest for the moment in Marion's daughter.

"Yes, to a young farmer, one of my tenants, John Akerman, and I think she is a lucky girl, for a more promising fellow I don't know for miles round; and, taking into consideration that her mother was an old and valued servant of your mother, I have given my agent directions to accept the offer he has made for the freehold, which is a sum considerably beneath its value. But that is of little importance, for on their wedding-day it is my intention to give the sum to the bride as dowry."

The next day the Devaine carriage was seen to draw up at The Cottage, nestling amid the fresh green trees of the early spring, where Mrs. Percival and her daughter lived; and when the young lady from the Abbey held out her hands to grasp those of her foster-mother, the tears rose to the eyes of the good woman, the strong emotion she felt remaining unexpressed, save in the look which passed over her countenance; and Mabel all the while too diffident to speak, alone regarding with untold admiration the girl who had been to her as a sister.

"Heaven bless you for this, Miss Devaine," the elder woman said, "I never thought you would have remembered us."

"Not remember you and Mabel!" the other exclaimed. "Why, you were almost the first I asked papa about last night. And so you are going to be married, Bal?" she said; "you have my best wishes," and she held out the hands she had withdrawn from the mother to place them in those of the girl, to whose face the hot blood surged, dyeing it carnation.

"You need not blush," the other laughed, "and, from what his lordship says, I trust you will be very happy."

A few moments longer—to visit old haunts, the pretty garden where the crocuses peeped above ground, and the bees, aroused to new life, came in and out from their hives; the arbour where the honeysuckle grew, and they had so often had tea within its shade, all seemed so familiar; no change but in themselves, on whom a new era in life was opening; and then Miss Devaine re-entered her carriage, leaving two hearts the happier for her visit.

"And I thought she would be too proud," Mabel said, as she watched the horses until a bend in the road hid them from view, and Millicent Devaine was gone.

Lady Augusta arrived at the end of the week—a little pale, careworn lady, on whose countenance rested the shadow of a great care; but she drew her niece towards her, kissing her affectionately, and telling her they must be very happy together.

Lord Devaine extended a hearty welcome, and Lady Augusta thought how much he had changed for the better since the time when, even at her death, he scarcely forgave his wife for leaving him no son, almost to ignoring his daughter's existence.

But it was not very long that they were going to remain at the Abbey then; the following May—and April had already half fled—his lordship having arranged that Millicent should pass her first season in town, his house in Berkeley-square being put in readiness to that end.

"I would rather stay here, amid the fields and the flowers," the girl said. "I hate towns!"

But Lady Augusta told her the vexation it would cause her father, who had set his mind on her being presented at Court, should she persist in raising an obstacle.

"Besides, my dear," her aunt said, "you will not always remain Miss Devaine; and who is there here a likely suitor for the hand of Lord Devaine's daughter?"

"I wish I had never been a lord's daughter," Millicent answered, "to have it dinned into my ears, as it has been, ever since Mdlle. de Fleur and that hateful Miss Sparrow were continually reminding me of what was incumbent on a young lady in my position to do; the Sparrow particularly, who was chirping from morning till night the same thing, until I quite envied Mabel, as I do now, the sphere in which it pleased Heaven to place her. I never want to get married!" she added passionately. "Why can't I stay as I am—here, where it is so beautiful, with you and papa, with the birds and the trees, and such a sunset as that, auntie, which you could never see amid bricks and mortar!"

Lady Augusta let her eyes follow to where, in a bed of crimson and gold, old Sol was sinking to rest, gliding to the last the clouds, turning from red to grey, and then there was left but a leaden bank where he had been.

"You love the Abbey, then?" she asked.

"I think it the sweetest place on earth; I should be so sorry to leave it."

"But the day will come, Mill, when it will pass into other hands, unless——"

"Unless what, auntie?"

"You marry the heir."

CHAPTER III.

Lady Augusta's communication came to her like a thunderbolt, revealing to her how it was, when a child, she had received so little love from his lordship. Not until she had grown to womanhood, his taking an interest in her, her beauty, her many gifts of person and mind, raising up, as he hoped, a way in which Ludlington Abbey would still remain to his child's children; and to that end he determined that she should hold her own in the fashionable world, and become sought by the man he desired of all others to gain her hand.

Reginald Horton was in the Guards, and, in anticipation of the estate which must, on the death of his uncle, revert to him, went the pace, as his brother officers said, and Lady Horton, his mother, inwardly deplored.

His father was a poor gentleman, who died when he was at Eton, leaving the former but little to depend on but her own money and the title she had brought with her; and when Lady Devaine died, leaving her brother without a son, she was almost glad that the Abbey, with its princely *rôle*, was likely to fall into the hands of her son.

There was only her and her brother, and, failing male issue, nothing could come between him and its golden acres.

Guthbert was not likely to marry now; in fact, he had almost told her as much, so what was there to stand between Reginald and Ludlington?

And then she received a letter to say that he was coming to London; that his daughter would be presented, and he hoped they should see much of each other during the time they were at Berkeley-square; so that the first to call on them when they arrived in town were Lady Horton and her son.

He fell desperately in love with his cousin when they had known each other but a few days, as he usually did with each fresh beauty; but in this case the handsome Guardsman's fancy threatened to be of longer duration, urged on, as he was, to become the possessor of the prize from the mere fact that every one else had fallen in love with her also.

On every side Millicent Devaine was the acknowledged belle of the season, but her heart was as yet impervious to the numerous assaults on it; and when she accepted Reginald at the close as she eventually did, it was more love for the Abbey, and Lady Augusta's arguments, that led to such a result.

The young officer amused her, and she enjoyed his society above everyone elses; and, if it was possible for one of his versatile disposition to be serious, he was so in his affection for his fair cousin.

"I wonder," he said, on one occasion, when he had led her from a hot ball-room to the cool of an adjacent conservatory, "if, after another season or so, you would become as they are!" and he motioned towards the room they had just left.

"Who do you mean?" she asked.

"Who? The women in there," he answered. "Their smiles as false as their complexions."

"I think you are very bitter," she said.

"Perhaps so," he answered. "Contact with the world makes one so; and yet you, who have been on the Continent, in Paris, are more like a wild, white rose one would long to gather and wear for its innocent simplicity."

"Would you have me different, then?"

Her blue eyes, so frank, so childish, were raised to his, and he, looking into them with a love in his own, that, man of the world as he was, he could not hide.

"By Heaven, no!" he answered, in the impulse of the moment, drawing her towards him, and imprinting a kiss, the first true one he had ever given a woman, on her lips. "My darling! My sweet, wild violet," he said, and then Lord Devaine it was who was seen approaching where they were.

After that, it became a published fact that the Honourable Miss Devaine would be shortly led to the hymeneal altar by Captain Reginald Horton, of the Guards.

And then, the summer months gliding rapidly away, there was a general exodus from the metropolis—Lord Devaine, his daughter and sister, returning to Ludlington, to recruit their strength after the London season.

Lady Augusta was as glad as her niece to be once more in the country, the pure, clear air doing so much to restore their flagging energies, happy that their stay in town had not been without its purpose, that the game for which she and her brother-in-law had played had been won.

And now it was that the preparations for the wedding became the chief matter of importance filling her mind! Blanchette, who had accompanied her mistress, returning brimful of delight with the prospect of such an event before her, and to the great amusement of Mrs. Osbrey giving her a full detail, in her strange English, of all the gaieties they had experienced.

"And leetle Miss Percival she no married yet!" she asked, after having gone fully into a description of "de beautiful gentleman" her lady was going to wed.

"No," Mrs. Osbrey answered, "they are not to be married till the autumn, and plenty of time too, so young as they are. But how is it, Mademoiselle, you are not engaged!"

The little French girl blushed, and then admitted there was a Monsieur, who wore white stockings and lovely red plush pantaloons, but of course, it was quite a secret between them.

A loud ring at the outer bell attracted their attention then, for the family being at dinner, it was an unusual hour for a visitor to arrive. So Mrs. Osbrey moved from the room to ask the man who had answered the door who it was?

"A gentleman for Lady Augusta," was the reply, the while he proceeded to the dining room bearing his card on a silver salver.

Her ladyship merely glanced at the name, giving instructions that he should be shown into the drawing-room, where, shortly after, excusing herself to Lord Devaine and Millicent, she joined him.

"Bertie!" she ejaculated, "what on earth made you come here!" and then, for the first time, she noticed it was not his right hand that he held towards her.

"Oh, nothing much, only dislocated," he said, following the questioning look she gave to his arm. "I met with an accident, mother dear; was thrown from my horse, or rather, some brute I hired to bring me on from the station, *vide* result," and he laughed.

"And you haven't had it set!" she asked, anxiously.

"Oh! yes, that being about the only recompense the livery stable keeper made me, to send for a doctor, and promise me a bed for the night, for you must know it was yesterday I arrived at Ludlington."

"With what object in view?" she asked, anxiously, knowing from former experiences the general motive of Bertie's visits.

"It was not my impecuniosity that prompted me this time, mother dearest," he answered, "but my good luck, and to tell you of it, which induced me to inflict my presence on you. Our old steward, Jack Stapleton, to whom I used to be such a terror in my boyhood, has died, making

me his heir to the tune of twelve thousand pounds."

"Jack Stapleton! How on earth did he amass such a sum!"

"That matters little now, mother. Conscience money, perhaps; there's no telling."

And Lady Augusta thought Bertie was not far from the truth, when she remembered how, through her husband taking no more interest in the state of his affairs further than to give cheques on his banker, the estate, which ought to have been her son's, had passed into the hands of the Jews, leaving her comparatively penniless.

"Promise me you will turn over a new leaf, then."

She had placed her hands on her son's shoulders, he looking down half-amused at the anxiety depicted on her features. But Guthbert Howard loved his mother dearly, and when a repentant fit was on him, as it was now, made a resolution, too often broken, never again to cause her another sorrow.

"I will," he answered, "if you promise to forgive my past folly."

A few minutes after, and Lady Augusta rejoined Lord Devaine and his daughter, who followed her to the drawing-room, where Bertie awaited them.

His lordship was ready to hold out the palm of forgiveness to his nephew when explanations had been entered into, the while it was but a short time before he and Millicent became close allies.

CHAPTER IV.

Lord Devaine would take no denial to Bertie remaining his guest, so there was nothing left for him to do than to telegraph to his superior officer the accident he had met with, and ask sick leave.

"Not that you will be able to handle a gun yet, my boy," his uncle said, "and I am afraid you will find the time hang rather heavy when the shooting commences, and you debarred from the sport."

But his nephew looked from his fancy eyes to where his cousin was engaged on some crewel work, and said "he didn't think so."

And then Lord Devaine went on to tell him of the proposed wedding to be shortly solemnised between Millicent and Reginald Horton, and his daughter all the while letting her head droop lower and lower over her embroidery to hide the carnation hue which had extended even to her ears.

Bertie had been now five weeks an inmate of the Abbey, and, notwithstanding letters were almost daily delivered from her *fiancé*, each one seemed to give less pleasure to Millicent Devaine, to whom eventually it became almost a bore to reply to them.

Reginald's ring on her finger and Reginald's photo in her boudoir remained there still, though a feeling to destroy the one and return the other often occurred to her mind.

She would roam in the woods around Ladlington with Bertie for her companion, and in those happy moments all thoughts of the man to whom she had pledged her troth went from her, Bertie's arm, which was now quite well, around her waist, and Bertie's silken moustache brushing the down from her cheek.

He knew she was promised to Reginald, but that mattered little; in fact, it made him all the more determined to gain her love, which deteriorated in value as he found it the more easy to obtain.

He never for a moment contemplated inducing her to break faith with Captain Horton, the relationship in which they stood to each other giving him a plea for self-justification, did she, in the end, regard in too serious a light, the love-passages which had passed between them.

And all this time Millicent was living in a fool's paradise, thinking little of the danger-ground she was treading—thinking of nothing but Bertie's soft voice, the love in Bertie's eyes, and forgetting her plighted troth, almost beginning to abhor the name of the man to whom she was to be soon united.

August had passed away in golden sunshine, beneath which the yellow corn waved and ripened; September following on, in which summer still lingered, as though unwilling to leave the warm earth, where her breath yet rested, and Guthbert Howard remained on at the Abbey.

Lord Devaine and his friends were out shooting, the two cousins saying they would stroll in the woods—Lady Augusta, who was not well, preferring to recline on the sofa in the full enjoyment of the latest novel.

"We will go by the Cottage," Millicent said. "It is a pretty walk, and you shall see my foster-mother, and her daughter, the belle of the village."

"The belle of the village, eh!" Bertie returned, knocking the undergrowth with his cane as they passed along. "Don't you think, Mill, the water would be preferable? I am not much of a judge of rural beauty, and to float lazily in that little boat on the lake, with you for a companion, would be far more enjoyable this hot day."

"We can go on the water after," she said. "I have not seen Mabel for an enormity of time, and it is only a short walk, under the trees nearly all the way."

It was useless to argue further, and Millicent had her way; but she thought how disagreeable Bertie had become all at once. And it was almost in silence they went on, until Mrs. Percival's cottage came in sight.

Mabel was standing by the gate when they approached. She had taken her hat from her head, and the soft breeze lifted the golden curls from her forehead, the while a deep blush spread over neck and face, when, raising her eyes, she saw them come towards her.

She seemed glad to see the young lady from the Abbey, but when the colour which had mounted to her temples on their first addressing her died away, Millicent thought how ill she was looking.

"Bel, what is the matter!" she asked. "Here I brought my cousin to see the village beauty, and you are as white as a ghost. Is your mother ill?"

The girl said no, and smiled faintly.

"I am quite well, Miss Devaine," she continued; "but I never liked hot weather. Mother is inside. She will be so glad if you will walk in."

"No, the child had not seemed herself lately," Mrs. Percival said, in reply to Miss Devaine's inquiries with regard to Mabel, "though she declares there is nothing the matter with her; but she never seems happy unless she has been up at the Abbey with Mrs. Osbrey, which she is mostly every evening."

"I wonder Mrs. Osbrey has not told me," Millicent answered, and looking at Mabel to her astonishment, her white face had become red as a peony; but the remark she was about to make died on her lips, Bertie becoming impatient to repair to the lake.

"And when is the wedding to be, Bel?" she asked, when, having bid her mother good-bye, she moved to where her cousin was already awaiting her without.

"That's just it, Miss Devaine," the elder woman replied, the while the tears had risen to her daughter's pretty eyes. "I wonder John has patience with her. Putting it off, putting it off, when he has got the prettiest home imaginable to take her to!" and Mrs. Percival's tone betrayed that if he had not lost his, she had hers.

Much did not pass between the cousins with reference to the inmates of the Cottage on their return, Bertie merely saying in reply to Millicent's question as to whether he did not think Mabel beautiful, "Well, really, he had scarcely noticed her."

"I wonder, Blanchette, you did not let me know that Mrs. Percival's daughter has been here nearly every evening," Miss Devaine said, when, later on, the French girl was dressing her for dinner.

"Messus Percival's daughter, Mademoiselle! I have not seen her!"

"Have not seen her! And yet you spend most of your time in the housekeeper's room!"

"Dat ess true, Mess Devaine," Blanchette answered; "but dat leetle girl, she was no dere."

"Why don't you speak in French, Blanchette!" Millicent said, sharply. "Your English is abominable," and she arose from the chair before the glass where the maid had been arranging her hair, Blanchette, continuing her duties almost in silence, wondering why it was her young lady was so cross, every one of the servants having told her her English was perfect.

"Tell Mrs. Osbrey to come here to me," she said, when the last touch had been put to her dress; and when the housekeeper made her appearance she was no less surprised than Millicent herself that Mabel should assign her visits to the Abbey as the cause of her frequent absence from home.

"I assure you, Miss Devaine, the girl has never been near the house since—let me recollect—since the second week Lady Augusta's son was here."

"She came then!"

"Yes, miss. Once for some geranium cuttings, the head-gardener had promised her mother, and which were not ready for her, so she came again twice afterwards, I remember so well, because Mr. Howard, who was passing through the little gate from the shrubbery at the time, asked one of the men who that pretty little girl was.

The gong sounded then, and Millicent, entering no further on the subject, told Mrs. Osbrey that would do.

She looked very handsome when, a few minutes after, she was in her father's drawing-room, entering fully into the conversation relative to the sport the gentleman had had, and bantering Bertie that he only made his weak arm an excuse that he did not join them.

"You don't mind my taking a stroll on the terrace, do you, auntie?" she asked, when, after dinner, at a signal from Lady Augusta, they had adjourned to the drawing-room, leaving the gentlemen to their wine and dessert. "See what a lovely moon! It is a shame to be indoors," when, gaining the elder lady's consent, she threw a light wrap over her shoulders, and passed through the window.

She could not define the feeling which had taken possession of her, but the more she puzzled over Mabel's strange conduct the more convinced she became that there was some under-current running she was determined to fathom.

The air was soft as June, the moonbeams resting on the green of the lawn, where the trees stood so silent, so still. Not a sound to break the serenity of the scene, save the call of a water-fowl at intervals in the lake beyond.

Wandering on, her mind too preoccupied to notice where, she soon found herself near the gate leading from the lawn to a small shrubbery which skirted on the right hand side, and where some large trees hid her entirely from the bright light of the moon, the black dress she wore rendering her even less conspicuous.

She did not know how long she had been standing there—all was so still, scarce a leaf stirring in the quiet around—when, the church clock in the distance striking nine, she was about to retrace her steps, as she felt convinced that she heard someone move in the bushes near where she was.

Fear was the last thought that entered her mind, curiosity alone riveting her to the spot, only a start of surprise being perceptible when, in utter astonishment, she saw Mabel Percival emerge from amongst the shrubs.

"You here at this hour, Bel! What does it mean!" she asked.

But the girl only started less visibly, and, a moonbeam at that moment alighting on her countenance, Millicent could see how deadly pale it was.

"Only my head ached so terribly, Miss Devaine," she answered, "and I was glad of a stroll."

"And you select this shrubbery, at least a mile from your mother's door! I should advise your returning without a moment's delay."

Mabel could not fail to detect in her young lady's tone the bitter sarcasm she took no pains to conceal, when, before she had time to carry out her suggestion, the scent of a cigar became obvious to both, and Millicent, turning quickly round, came face to face with Bertie.

"What brought you here?" she asked.

"That is just what I came to ask you, Mill!" he replied, removing the weed from his lips, and throwing it away. "Do you know there is a heavy dew falling, and you will catch your death of cold!"

"Do not prevaricate," she answered, "it is beneath a gentleman. You did not come here thinking to find me, but to meet Mabel Percival, and even she cannot deny it!" and Millicent would have brought them face to face; but when she thought to see her foster-sister stand trembling before her she was gone.

"My dear girl, you are dreaming!" he said. "What can Mabel, or whatever you call her, be to me? Why, I never saw her until you took me yourself to her mother's cottage this morning!"

"It is false! You have seen her when she has been to the Abbey for geranium cuttings."

Bertie laughed outright.

"Well, Mill," he said, "I gave you credit for more sense, more pride, than to be jealous of a little country girl like that, because, in a foolish moment, having passed her as she was coming through the gate to the gardens, I asked her who she was, as I might have done respecting any pretty girl who came across my path, and I suppose it has been repeated to you."

"Then, why did you not admit it, instead of saying you had never seen her before?"

"The meeting, dear cox, was so deeply impressed on my mind that I had forgotten all about it," he smiled. "So don't let us quarrel over such a folly as that, and I looking forward, as I was, to a moonlight ramble!"

"With Mabel, perhaps," she added, sarcastically.

"With Mabel! Pshaw!" he rejoined, in an injured tone. "If that is your conviction, it is useless for me to argue the point further," and he would have moved on one side that she might, relieved of his presence, have returned unaccompanied. But the pained expression in his hazel eyes, the sad tone in his musical voice, and Millicent Devaine was as wax in his hands.

It was not alone that she re-entered her father's drawing-room.

CHAPTER V.

Lady Augusta was pleased Bertie had brought her in. She said it was too late to be wandering about the grounds in thin summer attire, and the gentlemen had been looking forward to some music, but she, not being there, had repaired to the billiard-room.

Millicent said she was glad it was so, for she was not in voice, and felt more inclined to go to bed than to sing, so it was but a short time when, bidding her aunt and cousin good-night, she carried her inclination into effect.

But the god of sleep refused to woo her eyelids, hour passing hour, during which she remained tossing from side to side, first thinking of Reginald and his last letter still unanswered, the wedding-day drawing so near, and her love gradually gliding into repulsion at the very thought, and then of Bertie, with his winning ways, his saucy, seductive eyes, imperceptibly drawing her towards him, and her heart going out to him in all the intensity of a first true love.

One moment a sense of uneasiness would assail her with respect to Mabel, to be banished the next from her imagination as an insult to his feelings, and then the last moonbeams kissed her cheek and it suddenly became dark, when she fell into unconsciousness.

The weather still kept fine, gloriously so, and shooting, as far as the gentlemen were concerned, being the programme for the day, Bertie declared that having recovered the use of his arm to such an extent as he had, he for the first time felt equal to join in their sport.

Miss Devaine's wedding had been fixed for th second week in November, it being arranged that it was to take place from Berkeley-square; and not only was there a letter for her from Reginald that morning, but from Lady Horton also, expressing, in affectionate lines, with what pleasure she was anticipating the time when she could enfold her in her arms as her daughter.

"But I shall look forward to your spending a week or two with us before that," the epistle ran; and Millicent, to whom the subject had now become a bugbear, threw the letters down with an impatient gesture.

"I wonder if every girl is worried like this before she gets married?" she said, in answer to Lady Augusta's look of inquiry, when, before any reply could be given, a servant entered to ask if her ladyship would see Mrs. Percival.

"Yes, let her be shown in here," was the reply, and a moment after Marion entered the room.

She was evidently labouring under some painful excitement, her limbs shaking visibly as she seated herself, in obedience to Lady Augusta's wish.

"Is anything amiss, Mrs. Percival? You seem terribly upset."

But it was some moments before the poor woman could reply to her ladyship's question, the tears rolling down her cheeks, and she all the time folding and unfolding a sheet of note-paper she held in her hand.

"Excuse me, my lady," she said, "but I cannot help it, indeed I cannot," and then endeavouring to restrain her emotion, she held it towards her.

Lady Augusta cast her eyes over the scrawl, it was little more, blotted here and there with tears, which the writer had evidently shed, rendering the words almost illegible. And then she handed it to Millicent, to whom it presented itself in a new light.

"What can it mean?" she said, "Mabel gone! With whom? It was only last evening I saw her!"

"Yes, miss, that's it, with whom?" the woman repeated, "and she kissed me so lovingly last night, crying too all the time, and I wondering why."

And Marion again broke down with the intensity of her sorrow.

"But that is not the worst, my lady," she added, "for John Akerman, the man to whom she was to have been married next week, is just like one mad, vowing vengeance on the man who has lured her from him and virtue."

"But there is no reason the girl should not be married," Lady Augusta said. "You should not judge her too harshly. Is there no one you can think of to whom she was likely to have transferred her affections and become a wife?"

But Mrs. Percival only shook her head, folding and refolding the while the letter which Mabel had written telling her she was gone.

"No, no; she would have told me that," she answered. "And John so good; I could not have dreamt she would have served him so."

"And you can call to mind no one?" Millicent asked, in whose mind a vague suspicion, almost bordering on certainty, had taken root.

"No, Miss Devaine. Of course, there are tongues always ready to slander, and many a one was jealous of Mabel's beauty; but I never pay any attention to what people say."

"Then there was a suggestion, Mrs. Percival?"

"Well, miss, some one dared to hint it might be one of the gentlemen at the Abbey," Marion returned, with flashing eyes, "but no gentleman would so abuse the hospitality of his lordship!"

"I am truly sorry for you," Lady Augusta said, "and we will see that inquiries are set on foot. But I can give but little hope. Here, drink this, it will do you good. Fretting is worse than useless."

Mrs. Percival took the wine her ladyship had poured out, her hand shaking so painfully each moment she feared to drop the glass on the carpet.

"You are very kind, my lady," she said, and then, Lord Devaine entering the room, she, after returning his salutation, passed through the open door.

"What is the matter with the poor woman?" he asked; "she looks the picture of grief."

"Her daughter has run away, foolish child, no one knows with whom, no one knows where; but how is it you have returned alone, Guthbert?"

"Don't be frightened, Augusta," he answered, "but Bertie has met with an accident—nothing serious, only I thought you would fancy it was something dreadful, so came on to prepare you; they are bringing him home, Lawrence and Campbell staying behind to superintend his removal."

A look of relief, almost of gratitude, rose to the blue eyes of Millicent, followed by one of apprehension as to the extent of the injury Bertie had received, taking as it did from the joy she experienced that it was not he who was the companion of Mabel's flight.

"Here they come!" his lordship said, looking from the window. "Mrs. Osbrey" (for the housekeeper had appeared on the scene), "let this sofa be drawn round, and give orders that Dr. Manton is sent for at once."

A few minutes after, and they had laid him on the couch, Lady Augusta making anxious inquiries, and Millicent looking the love she dare not express.

"I'll take my oath, Devaine, it was a stray shot," the one he called Campbell was saying, the while Lawrence was positive; "he said he saw a fellow looking like a farmer take deliberate aim at the injured man."

"At the partridges, most likely," his lordship, replied. "We are not in Ireland to be shot at behind hedges; besides, who in Ludlington could possibly have a grudge against the boy?"

"Only mistaking him for some one against whom they had," Lawrence answered, and then the doctor was announced.

"A superficial wound," he said; "nothing to be alarmed about; fever the only thing to be guarded against."

"You must get me all right in a few days, doctor, for I am due in London on the twenty-first."

It was the first time Bertie had spoken excepting in monosyllables in reply to questions put, but Dr. Manton saying that would be all right if he only kept quiet, he soon closed his eyes, when all left the room with the exception of his mother and Millicent.

"What an unlucky boy he is," Lady Augusta said. "No sooner recovered from one accident than he meets with another. We won't disturb him now; he seems inclined to sleep. But I will give orders to have everything in readiness by the time he awakes. Are you coming, Millicent?"

"Presently, auntie," the girl answered, busying herself in putting away some needlework on which she had been engaged, not until Lady Augusta had closed the door behind her returning to the side of the wounded man.

"Are you hurt much, Bertie?" she asked.

"No, dear," he replied. "But the odd part of the business is, who was the fellow who shot me?"

"I fancy I know," Millicent said. "John Akerman."

"And pray who is John Akerman?"

"The man to whom Mabel Percival was to have been married on Monday, and she has run away with someone else."

"And what has that to do with me?" he asked.

"Only maybe John mistook you for that someone else."

"That is nonsense, dear!" he answered. "The man who she went away with wouldn't be here, would he? But I think I can go to sleep now, Mill. Kiss me, there's a good girl, and I'll try."

The bright warm sun was coming in, shining

just where he lay; so Millicent drew the blind down, and then she noiselessly went back to the work she had put aside, feeling a gladness in her heart for which she could not account; and yet she was sorry for Mrs. Percival, sorry for Mabel, but most of all for Reginald Horton, her affianced lover.

And then yet another thought, causing her the greatest uneasiness, entered her mind. Should she break her engagement? The Abbey, where she was born, which had become almost as dear to her as to Lord Devaine himself, would be lost to both!

CHAPTER VI.

In less than a week Bertie was all right again, he said, and felt he could not longer delay going to London.

"But what makes you in such a hurry, Bertie?" his mother asked. "A few days surely will make no difference; and we leave the Abbey now very shortly!"

"It makes all the difference," he answered. "The lawyers who have the settlement of Stapleton's affairs write to say they want expressly to see me; therefore, much as I should have preferred to have waited until November, it is out of the question."

So the next morning Bertie went, bidding Millicent an affectionate adieu, and saying he supposed, after all, Reginald Horton would be the lucky man."

"I believe you almost wish it!" she answered, with a pretty pout.

"You know I don't wish it, Milly," he said, drawing her towards him until his lips met hers. "But my being only cousin on your mother's side, I could not give you the Abbey as Captain Horton can, and I love you too well to let you make the sacrifice! But we have been very happy, dear!" he added, the love she could not resist showing in his eyes. "And the days we have spent together will be a memory that will never leave me. And—sometimes," he added, "you will think of me, won't you!"

But Millicent could not answer, for tears choked her utterance; and then they heard Lord Devaine's voice saying he would miss the train, and a few minutes after she was watching from the window until she could no longer hear the sound of the wheels—until the trees, yellow and red with autumnal tints, had hidden him from view.

The other guests soon followed, and then it was arranged that they should return to Berkeley-square.

Of Mabel they heard nothing more, and Millicent had almost forgotten her existence, so much did her own affairs occupy her attention.

At first her love for Bertie gave way to pride, when she considered how easily he had renounced her when there was no sacrifice she would not have made for him; and the nearer her wedding-day approached the greater she felt her repugnance to it, until at times she thought she could no longer hide from Reginald the change in her feelings.

But on the other hand, he was so good, so kind, Lady Horton declaring she never saw such an improvement in anyone as in Reggy since he had known her, and when she thought of her father, and what the breaking off of her engagement would mean to him, her resolution wavered.

How many, she ruminated, marry, not caring for each other, and yet they are apparently very happy, and even get to love one another fondly in after years. That, perhaps, might be her case.

Reginald could not fail to see she was altered, but he bore with her changed attitude towards him until even, in spite of all, she became her former self.

They had now been in London three weeks, and only once had they seen Bertie, passing him when driving in the Park.

He was accompanied by a lady, but her features were not discernible, owing to the shadows which the ate afternoon were throwing around; Lady Augusta suggesting, with a smile, that it was very likely some new flame. Bertie was such an awful flirt.

He came to the wedding, however, the doing so giving infinitely more pleasure to himself than his presence contributed to Millicent's happiness; and once, at the breakfast, he met her eyes, which looked so reproachfully into his own.

After that she was glad when the time came for her to change her dress, and alone with Reginald, she was beyond the influence of his power over her.

She felt the hot blood surge to her face, dyeing it with crimson, as she recalled to mind how near she had been to sacrificing everything for this man, who could renounce her without a regret, tears of mortified pride gushing to her eyes when there recurred to her mind the love-passages which had passed between them.

But it was all over now, her emotion even assigned to a different cause, as for the last time she was pressed within her father's embrace, Bertie looking on unmoved, whilst they all bid her God-speed; and then he held out his hand, the last she should hold within her own, making the old love to rise up for one moment in her heart; ere it went out for ever.

"Heaven bless you Mill," he said, that none but she could hear. "Love versus Ludlington, the latter triumphant. May you be happy."

He turned then, a sneer she could not fail to see apparent on his handsome face; and shortly after she was gone, amid a shower of rice and heartfelt wishes, for her wedded bliss.

In accordance with Lord Devaine's desire, Lady Augusta still remained at the Abbey, the town-house being assigned to the occupation of the young people on their return.

Mabel's singular flight had been but a nine days' wonder; then all, save Mrs. Percival and John Akerman, had ceased to think further of it Lady Augusta only asking, on one occasion, if she had heard anything of her daughter, to which her reply was,—

"No; and she didn't suppose she should now, till the villain who had lured her away had wearied of her. But with John it was different; he could not rest at Ludlington, so had let his farm for awhile. He would not sell it, he said, for he knew he should find her one day, and then it would be his turn to bring her to at the end."

"It is useless to argue the point, mother," he would say, "for there's not a corner in the whole earth but that I'll search her out, and punish him."

"And so he has left here!" Lady Augusta said.

"Yes, my lady," Marion replied. "He went to London as soon as ever the new tenant took possession, and I almost pray he may never find her, at least with him," she added, meaning her betrayer. "For Heaven only knows what the end would be."

"And you have never had any suspicion as to who he may be!"

Mrs. Percival raised her eyes, filled with tears, at her ladyship's question, for a moment seemingly about to reply; but the answer she would have given died on her lips, and she merely said "No!"

And so the autumn passed away, the first frost of winter settling in tiny beads of crystal on bush and bough; and still she remained alone in her Cottage, around which the wind moaned and shrieked, as though to mock her in her great grief.

And all this while the weeks were slowly passing away. Christmas soon at hand, to be spent by her, all lonely as she was, and the snow lying white and thick around.

"You must come to dinner at the Abbey," Mrs. Osbrey told her; but she only shook her head, saying, "She would rather not; they were all young folks there, and she would only be as a wet blanket thrown over their enjoyment," adding, "no, should she return it would be to the Cottage. She would come, and she it was who would watch for her still."

And the housekeeper knew to whom it was the poor woman alluded, telling Lady Augusta afterwards she couldn't get it out of her mind; but she thought poor Marion was fretting herself to death, for that good-for-nothing daughter of hers.

And then there came a letter from John Akerman to the Cottage. He had seen Mabel, but it was only as she passed him; and, although he had made every endeavour to discover where she went to, the cab in which she was became lost to him in the crowded thoroughfare, and, for a time, she had evaded him.

"Yes, for a time, mother," he wrote, "that is all, for now that I know she is in London there is not a stone I will leave unturned till I find her."

After this Marion became brighter, each morning finding her occupied in making preparation for the girl's return, to be disappointed as each evening found her still alone. But she would not lose heart, the closing of the one day but giving her renewed hope in the dawn of another.

Reginald and his bride had returned to Berkeley-square, previous to making their intended visit to the Abbey at the ensuing Yuletide, Bertie being amongst the number of those who called on them, on their coming back.

"I am here to wish you good-bye, Millicent," he said, when, on his being announced, she arose to greet him. "I am so glad to find you alone."

"Indeed!" she answered coolly. "I fail to see why, and if you have no wish to see my husband, I fear you will not be pleased to know I expect him every moment. In fact I thought it was he when you were announced."

"I did not mean that, Mill," he said, in the old style, letting his eyes, so seductive in their power, rest upon her. "But I am going away, and I thought you, like me, would prefer our parting, may be for the last time, unwitnessed."

He saw that for a moment the colour faded from her face, and he almost believed the old love was about to assert itself; but when he would have held out his arms towards her he saw how mistaken he had been.

"Bertie! you forget yourself," she said, proudly; and then Reginald Horton, the husband of the woman he now truly loved, entered the room.

"Bertie has called to say good-bye, dear!" she said, advancing, "he is going away."

"Yes, my regiment is under orders for India," Cuthbert joined in, the while he extended his hand to Captain Horton, who asked when he started.

"We leave Portsmouth on the fifteenth," he answered; "therefore this will be the last opportunity I shall have of wishing you and Mrs. Horton farewell."

A short time after, and he had left. He was sorry, he told them, but he had a prior engagement, which would prevent him accepting the kind invitation they gave him to remain to dinner.

And then, for the last time, he took Millicent's hand within his. It was very cold, and he could feel it tremble like an imprisoned bird in his strong clasp, and the eyes that met his were moist with unshed tears, he turning quickly aside that she might not see the pain depicted on his every feature.

"Rather sudden, isn't it!" the only comment expressed by Reginald, referring to his departure, as the door closed for ever on Bertie Howard.

CHAPTER VII.

And still John Akerman pursued his search for Mabel, wandering like an uneasy spirit around the haunts in which he felt he had more chance of finding her; and then, at last, after weary weeks, when unsuccessful, he began to doubt of ever coming across her, he saw her amid a crowd of others as they emerged from one of the principal theatres.

Like a madman he pushed amongst those surrounding the door, until, more in fear than ought else, people moved aside to let him pass, and he heedless of all but that one cab, in which, unconscious of his presence, Mabel was driven to her residence in a suburban square.

She was alone, but John could not mistake

the pale beauty of her fair face, and, though the distance was long, still he pushed on, until, too weary to proceed further on foot, he hailed a passing hansom, telling the man to follow the one in front, not stopping until that stopped also.

What an interminable distance it seemed, and never did cabman drive so slowly, John thought, as those two, the while they followed on to the destination of the former.

But they stopped at last. After dismissing the one he had engaged he waited until having received his fare, that which had brought Mabel, also turned away.

It was bitterly cold, and the wind was moaning amid the bare branches of the trees overhead, as he still remained leaning against the square railings, gazing on the lighted windows of the house she had entered. And then he saw the curtains unclose from those of the first floor, and Mabel herself opening the window step on to the balcony.

The moon, pale and cold, looked down on her from above, causing the stones around her neck and in her ears to glitter beneath its ray, the while he drew further into the shadow that he should not be seen, and his heart beating so loudly, he feared the girl standing there in the moonlight could not fail to hear its pulsations.

But she only turned, looking to where the gate opened on to the main road, and then, with a shiver, drawing the wrap that had fallen from her shoulders closer around her, she entered the room.

And he still watching, until he saw the heavy drapery again fall to, then moved across to where the brass of the knocker shone out like gold on the bright, frosty night.

But the girl who answered his summons hesitated some moments ere she allowed him to cross the threshold, for the name, how could he know the one by which she was known, so he said "Percival, he was from the country, and could not be denied."

But the servant only looked at him in astonishment, amounting to fear.

"It was the wrong house," she said, "there was no Mrs. Percival lived there."

And then a voice, the tones of which sent the blood from his heart, called from above,—

"Who is it, Jane?"

And John could hear the whish of her silken skirts, as, without waiting further, he pushed by the servant and ascended the stairs.

For the moment, so dim was the light that he was unrecognised, but when the one word "Mabel" fell on her ears, a groan—almost a scream—escaped her.

But even then, in her shame, her great dread that he had learnt the truth, her presence of mind did not forsake her, when, after turning to Jane, who had followed on the heels of the strange visitor, to say it was all right, she led him within the drawing-room she had just vacated.

The fire crick-cracked in the bright grate, the gilt timepiece on the marble above ticking the minutes off, of which those two seemed unconscious, as they stood gazing on each other with wide-opened eyes.

And then, calling her by her name, John was the first to break the silence.

"It is months, Mabel, that I have been waiting for this," he said.

But she did not answer, only clutching the table for support, and her breath coming from her in quick, short gasps.

"Won't you give me one word!" he asked.

And then he would have taken her hand, where the rings sparkled and glittered, within his own, but she drew it from him.

"And to what purpose?" she asked at last.

And then a sudden thought seemed to take possession of her; a shadow of pain, even fear, passed over her features, as she added, "was it to tell me of my mother?"

But he did not answer then, only looking into those beautiful eyes, now upraised, where the tears rested, and wondering the while if she would have shed one for him.

And then he told her how, through her heartless conduct, she had brought her to the verge of the grave.

"Poor mother!" was all she said, but seating herself by the table where they had been standing she let her head droop until it became buried in her hands—those hands where the jewels glistened as if in mockery of her grief.

And John Akerman, still in the same position, saw how her bosom heaved with the intensity of her great sorrow, and the tears oozing through her white fingers all the while. But when he would have drawn them from her face and press them within his, her deceit, her ingratitude, all forgotten in the great love he still felt for her, it was then he looked in vain for that emblem of her purity which he had hoped there to find, and the hand which in that moment she had unresistingly given into his keeping fell uncared for to her side.

"Mabel, will you come back—with—me?"

She looked up then and saw the terrible suffering he was enduring; and yet his words—his tone—so gentle, so kind.

"Oh! don't ask me, John," she said; "anything but that. I dare not go back! I could not——"

"Leave him," he answered, for the first time a bitterness in his voice he could not control, her silence showing him he had completed the sentence she had left unfinished. "And who is this man?" he asked.

But she did not reply, only sobbing as though her heart would break, when, in turning, he brushed against a something on the table, which fell to the floor.

"I thought I could not be wrong," he said, as, having recovered it, he replaced the photo which had fallen in its place. "And so this is the villain who has taken you from your home, from your friends, to throw you on one side, when weary of his new toy?"

The sight of the serpent that had crept into his Paradise had for the moment aroused the worst passions in his nature. His face had become scarlet, while the veins in his forehead stood out like great cords beneath his skin; and then, his passion having exhausted itself, he stood silently by, and Mabel sobbing until her whole frame quivered with excitement.

"Heaven help you, my sweet love!" he said at last, "and—your mother," he added, after a pause. "I cannot return to Ludlington without fulfilling the promise I gave her to bring you with me. So that will be my address until——"

He did not finish the sentence then, only taking a card from his pocket on which he scribbled a few words and left it with her.

He was gone then, out into the bitter night, the piercing cold, unconscious of all but the burning fever at his heart, and ever before his eyes that beautiful head bowed with a terrible sorrow, ever in his ears the wails of those bitter sobs.

He knew it was late, very late; the houses were all closed, and, in that suburban road the chance of a cab was out of the question; but so full was his mind of recent events that he heeded not the distance he had to traverse before arriving at his lodgings.

He heard, as he thought, the sound of angry tones at a distance, but they died away in the night air, and, with the exception of two men who passed him quickly by, he saw no one.

"Shan't be sorry to get out of this lonely neighbourhood," he soliloquised; "those fellows look as if they would stand at little short of murder, and he instinctively rebuttoned his overcoat, which in his excitement he had left unfastened.

But he had not proceeded far before he saw what he concluded to be the form of a drunken man lying on the pavement.

"Oh! that was the quarrelling I heard," he said to himself, "and they have left their companion here, to go on the best way he can."

But a moment after, and he was beside the fallen body of the prostrate man, his hand on his heart to feel if he still breathed, and then he withdrew it with a start, almost a cry of terror, as the moon, emerging from a cloud, threw her pale, cold light on the still features, the glazed eyes of Cuthbert Howard.

He could not move. A power he could not withstand, like as in a nightmare, rooted him to the spot. He heard, as in a dream, the tread of the policeman on his beat, but not until a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder did his limbs feel able to perform their office.

"Well, sir! you must come with me to the station," the constable said, after hearing what John Akerman had to say, when leaving the corpse in charge of a brother officer, who had now appeared in answer to his whistle, he laid hold of his arm.

The hot blood flew to the young farmer's face as endeavouring to loose himself from his hold.

"Surely you don't think I killed him!" he said.

"I don't say what I think, or what I don't think," the man answered. "There has been foul play, there's no two questions about that, and when I comes on the scene it is only you, sir, I finds with the victim."

The man's argument was right; and merely saying it was unfortunate, that was all, he went with him to the nearest station.

There were few about at that hour and although one or two had gathered around the scene, they were almost in ignorance as to the motive which induced John to accompany the policeman.

And all that night how terrible were the thoughts that passed through his mind, as during his detention he recalled that scene in Mabel's drawing-room but a few short hours since, the suspicion surrounding him, which might even be turned to a conviction of certainty, when all the circumstances surrounding the case were fully investigated.

He could see, even then, that the inspector who took the charge doubted the veracity of his statement respecting the two men who had passed him but a short time before he discovered the dead man. Only one point in his favour, and that was, he had no valuables about him, and but little money, the while Bertie's jewellery and purse were gone; and then on the other hand, the irritability, almost amounting to madness, he displayed, when informed that he would have to be detained pending inquiries, went equally against him.

And so the weary night passed away, John Akerman as a caged bird beating his wings against the walls of his temporary prison; and the girl, for whose sake he would have given up his life, looking out with wild, frightened eyes, as the first light of another day broke in the cold grey of the winter sky, for the lover whose voice she should never hear again.

CHAPTER VIII.

Millicent was the first to read the paragraph relating to Bertie's sad end, Reginald finding her with the evening paper in her hand, a dull look of untold pain apparent on her lovely face, and her finger pointing to what she had not the power to tell him. And then, reading further, it was John Akerman they learnt who had been arrested on suspicion.

"John Akerman!" she exclaimed, as her husband read on; and then a horrible suspicion again entered her mind as it had done on that day when her cousin had been brought to the Abbey, shot by an unseen hand.

But she only told Reginald that her foster-sister's sweetheart was that name, but it might not be the same.

To telegraph to Lady Augusta at the Abbey was no sooner mooted than acted upon; and so in the dull light of the early closing day her ladyship arrived at Berkeley-square.

Lady Horton it was who, at her son's wish, first broke the dreadful news to her on her arrival, he and Millicent both feeling she could do so less clumsily than themselves.

"He is at his own house now," they told her, when she asked to where the body had been conveyed; and, notwithstanding they would fain have had her wait till the following day, no argument on their part could dissuade her from going there at once.

"I would rather go alone," she sobbed. "I

could not bear that anyone, not even you, dear Millicent, should be a witness of my grief." And so in the dark gloom of the December evening the bereaved mother was driven to the residence of the dead son she almost worshipped.

The blinds were all closed, a sense of melancholy hanging over the whole place, when, in answer to her knock, an elderly woman opened the door.

At first she almost resented her entrance, until Lady Augusta told her in what position she stood to the murdered man. And then, asking her into a pretty drawing-room on the first floor, she said she would inquire if she could then be led to where he lay.

Notwithstanding the agony of mind she was enduring, her ladyship could not fail to notice the elegant surroundings of the pretty room, so unlike to that she had expected to find as belonging to her bachelor son.

On the centre table, in a plush frame of crimson, was Bertie himself, looking at her, as he had so often done in life, with those saucy, seductive eyes, whose glance she never could refuse. And then she turned to where, in a corner on a gilt tripod, was a woman's workbasket, from which different coloured wools were hanging, as though they had been hastily thrown in, the while an unfinished slipper, with the needle stuck in it, lay on the floor beside it.

It seemed to have an unusual fascination, this evidence of a woman's presence, to her ladyship; and then, in looking around the apartment, the same made itself to be seen in every arrangement of its luxurious and costly furniture.

But in all there was felt the presence of Death, and then her tears flowed afresh when Lady Augusta recognised the fact that the features smiling to her from the photo were lying motionless and still beneath the hand that levels all.

The woman returned then, and together they ascended the soft, carpeted stairs until they entered the room, just over the one she had that moment vacated, and there lay Guthbert, her only son. The features were unaltered, the stab which had caused his death having been in the heart.

For some time she stood gazing on the beloved face (she had told the woman to leave them alone), and then, kneeling by the coffin she pressed her lips to the cold forehead, sobbing and wailing out the grief she could not restrain.

And then it was that a sound broke upon her ear, like to the echo of her own intense sorrow; and raising her head she saw a young girl kneeling on the other side where the dead was.

She was unable to recognise her, the subdued light scarcely reaching to the place she occupied, partly hidden as she was by the heavy folds of a curtain, beneath which the coffin was placed. And when she found that her presence was detected, she passed through a door leading into the adjoining apartments.

Lady Augusta left shortly after that, but she would not leave London until not only had the funeral taken place, but John Akerman had been tried for the murder. And, notwithstanding that the best counsel were engaged in his behalf, so great was the evidence against him that it was with a sinking heart that he stood before the tribunal.

There was the animus existing between the two men, owing to the fact that Mabel Percival, his promised wife, had left her home but a few weeks before, going to London, where she was almost immediately joined by Guthbert, and would have been even sooner had he not been detained through a gun-shot wound he received from an unknown hand when out shooting, Lieutenant Lawrence recognising in the prisoner the man who on that occasion took deliberate aim at him.

And then Mabel was called upon to state her relations with the dead man, and the interview which, according to her servant, had taken place between her and the accused on that night the former was discovered stabbed to death.

She was dressed in deep mourning, the gold of her hair showing as an aureole around her head in contrast to the heavy black of her surroundings; and when, in obedience to orders, she raised the thick veil which covered her face, all—even John starting at the sight—saw how deadly pale she was.

But her youth, her extreme beauty, drew all hearts towards her in her great trial; but no one could fail to see with what looks of sorrow, even pity, she let her eyes rest on the man at the bar. And then she turned to where Mrs. Horton, her foster-sister, was gazing sadly on the scene, when her fortitude gave way, and, with a shriek which went through the hearts of all present, she fell to the floor.

Unconsciousness had come to her relief, saving her the knowledge of that which would have cost her a greater pang, that John Akerman, the man she had once loved, the man whose promised wife she had been, was condemned to die.

But to John himself that sentence gave but little terror. He thought not of his own sufferings, they would soon be over; but the sound of that shriek would go with him to his grave. And in his cell he wrote, in the agony of his heart, to Lady Augusta, telling her (the pen so shaking in his hand that he could scarce form his letters) that he was innocent of the fearful crime imputed to him, but that death for him had no dread. He thought but of the girl for whom he was now suffering so much, begging her with his last breath to save her, young, beautiful as she was, from that which might come to her, worse than even death itself.

And then of Marion, her poor mother.

"Oh! my lady," the letter continued, "let Mabel be taken back to her. No one in Ludlington need know of the dark blot resting on the purity of her former life; and, as for me, thank Heaven I have no parents to mourn my untimely end."

And the next day Lady Augusta went. She yet believed John Akerman to be innocent. He had not the face of a murderer, she insisted; and so, when the letter he had written to her was put into her hand, she never hesitated to carry out the wishes of the man who sent her to the girl who had so grossly deceived him.

Bertie's death was never laid by her at his door, or she could not have read the words he had penned, and so she determined to carry out his wish, and see Mabel.

She had not been near the house since that day when he was laid to rest in the pretty cemetery beyond, and she almost feared to find the girl gone, she knew not where.

"Let me go with you, auntie!" Millicent had asked, sharing as she did her opinion with respect to John Akerman, as also did Lord Devaine, who, as he said, would not leave a stone unturned even now to prove his innocence.

But a load was lifted from the heart of each when the servant informed them that her mistress was within, and once again Lady Augusta was ushered into the little drawing-room.

There was little alteration. The photo stood as it had done when she first recognised it on the centre table; but near where the golden tripod was Mabel was seated, her hands white, like wax, resting on her knee, her eyes so sad, gazing into space.

But the colour flew to her pale face when her visitors were announced, not until the elder lady held her hand kindly to her daring to approach; and then, with the tears standing in her beautiful eyes, she grasped it warmly.

"You know then!" she asked, a sudden gleam of pleasure passing over her countenance, "Mr. Minton, poor Bertie's lawyer. Did he tell you!"

"Tell me what, my child!" her ladyship asked. "Mabel, I don't understand."

"And yet you come to see me," she questioned, "me whom you believe to be your son's——"

But the elder woman would not let her complete the sentence, drawing her kindly towards her for Bertie's sake, and telling her she was more sinned against than sinning; and then she told her how Millicent, her foster-sister, was there to see her too.

But the girl only looked sadly into her foster-sister's face, and then she appeared to be deeply thinking.

"Oh, if I might only tell you!" she said, addressing her ladyship, "but I took an oath to him—to Bertie—that I would never divulge the truth."

"My child, if it is right that we should know, no oath given to the dead can affect you now."

"I am glad of that," she said, "so glad. Mr. Minton said it was wrong of me not to speak, but I felt as if I were wronging him, and for myself it matters so little now."

"But supposing your duty to the living, to those who still love you, Mabel, requires you should open your lips, would you do it then?"

She did not answer, and then Lady Augusta told her of the unhappy man, who, in his greatest sorrow, in his cell, condemned, as she believed, for another's crime, thought only of her, bidding her read the letter she had that morning received.

She read then John Akerman's words, her tears falling the while in great splashes on the written page; and then it fell upon her lap, great sobs breaking from her, shaking her entire frame.

"Will nothing save him?" she asked.

"Everything that can be is being done, Lord Devaine using his influence to the utmost, but we are almost afraid to hope," Lady Augusta said.

"Then tell him—let him know how I feel my share, the unhappy share, I had in bringing him to his miserable position, but I am not the thing he takes me for. The day Bertie joined me in London we were man and wife."

"Oh, Mabel, I am so glad!"

It was Millicent who spoke, throwing her arms around her foster-sister, and telling her how thankful she was that she could take such glad tidings to her mother.

"But I swore to him I would never tell," she added; and then she told Lady Augusta that only to Mr. Minton had the secret been divulged, that the "will," in which Bertie had left all to his wife, might never be disputed.

CHAPTER IX.

"YES, that was the case," the lawyer said, when Reginald, who had, at Millicent's wish, called on him, told him how matters were. "But——"

"And what is the 'but,' Mr. Minton!" he asked.

"Well, I don't think if the lieutenant had had his way, there would have been any marriage at all; in fact, he had already begun to weary of his new toy some time previous to his death."

"Then the poor girl ought to be thankful, instead of mourning his loss."

Mr. Minton merely shrugged his shoulders, and then promising to do all that was possible for young Akerman according to his visitor's request, after a while Reginald left.

But day passed day, and no hope held out to the condemned man; the date fixed for the execution meanwhile approaching.

He had seen Mabel, as he thought, for the last time. She had begged so hard to be allowed to see him; but during the interview, so broken down was each with the emotion they could not control, that little passed between them with reference to the crime for which he was doomed to suffer.

"You do not believe me guilty, Mabel? Tell me that, and I shall walk with a firm step to the gallows!"

She could not answer at first, for at times would come to her recollection the scene between them, when, carried away by his jealous rage, he had vowed to be revenged on Bertie.

He saw her hesitation, and turned aside that she might not see the spasm of pain which contracted his features.

"You look upon me as his murderer, then!" were the only words he uttered.

"I—I don't! No, no, John, not now!" she

answered, "I did at first; feeling even the sin more mine than yours. But they must, they shall save you, John. Oh! Heaven, it is terrible that the innocent should suffer such a death."

But he only took her in his arms—she would have fallen, her excitement was so great—looking sadly on the face he loved so fondly; and then the warder told them they must part.

He was a kind man, the moisture in his eyes showing he was not an unmoved witness of the scene—Mabel, so fair, even clinging to him for support as he led her from the place.

There seemed to be no hope then, John Akerman, burying his face in his hands, thinking to have looked on the features so dear to him for the last time.

And then, behind the clouds, was seen the silver lining.

Several burglaries had been perpetrated in the West End during those weeks, and no clue could be obtained to the thieves, when a pawnbroker to whom a man offered in pledge a valuable bracelet, being one of the stolen articles, the police were communicated with, and the man arrested.

Notwithstanding his asserted innocence, inquiries into the truth of the statement he made as to how he became possessed of the article were set on foot, ending in the discovery after a long time, of chief of the missing property.

And in a room, which was given as the address of his mate, amongst the jewellery found there was a gentleman's gold watch and chain which he told the policeman who took him in charge was one his pal had taken from the swell they had knocked down on the night Bertie was murdered.

Yes, it was the same date, and though no name had been mentioned, Mr. Minton had seen the paragraph, and lost no time in sifting the matter, calling upon Captain Horton, and asking him at once to accompany him to Scotland-yard.

Mabel also identified it as her husband's property; when the men, finding it useless to deny anything further, the having revenge one on the other being now uppermost in their minds, confessed that it was at their hands the unfortunate man met his death, though robbery not murder, was the object they had in view at the time.

And John, with Mabel's image ever before his eyes, patiently awaited the fate from which he thought now there was no escape. Christmas coming on, with its mistletoe and holly, its joys and its pleasures, and he never again to hear the chimes which would ring out wish peace and gladness to all when he was cold and forgotten in a felon's grave.

And so he sat the weary days out in his gloomy cell, unconscious of all but that terrible hour advancing with such rapid strides, when he would go from the world leaving nothing but that miserable flag to tell that he had paid the forfeit of his life for another's crime.

There were moments when he would rebel in his soul against this gross injustice, even questioning Heaven's truth and mercy; and then, when it was darkest, when he had sunk to the depths of despair, doubt almost of his God taking possession of him, there came the joyous news.

He was free!

Then he stood like one bewildered. Passing his hand over his eyes, like as if he were in a dream, when all around him—the wooden table, the plank bed—all went round in one giddy whirl, and he clutching to save himself from falling; then a blow against some hard substance; and forgetfulness.

"Get him away from London as soon as possible," the doctor told Millicent, who insisted that he should be brought at once to Berkeley-square, when all that had happened was made known to her. But when nothing seemed to arouse him from the apathy into which he had fallen, when consciousness returned, that was the advice given.

So they took him to Ludlington, the snow coming down the while in thin, feathery flakes, and he looking on with a dull, dead look on his handsome face, knowing none of those around him, not even Mabel, who would use every endeavour to bring him back to himself.

Lord Devaine sent a carriage to the station, that he might be conveyed immediately on his arrival to Mrs. Percival's, that good woman looking out with anxious eyes over the frosty road, regardless of the bitter wind driving the snowflakes around her, until a black moving object, showing so plainly on the white of the landscape, told her they were coming. And a few minutes after, it was into her arms that young a girl leapt, only staying a moment to kiss the sunken cheek, and then to turn to the assistance of the other occupant of the vehicle.

"You know all, dear mother," Mabel said, when at last they had entered the Cottage, where everything was in readiness for the invalid. "And you forgive me?"

But Marion could not reply then. Her tears were falling so fast down the face which had become so thin and lined; but holding out her arms she pressed her to her bosom, and Mabel knew that the past would be blotted out from her remembrance.

"Lady Augusta told me, dear," she said, after awhile, "and if she can forgive, who has suffered so terribly, how much more so should I, to whom Heaven has been so merciful!"

They looked up then, even John gazing around him with that fixed, quiet sadness less visible in his eyes, when the door opened, and Lady Augusta entered.

"At last, Marion!" she said, "Heaven has heard your prayer," and then Mabel releasing herself from her mother's embrace, turned to her ladyship.

"My more than mother, how can I thank you!" she said.

(*Continued on page 545.*)

A SECRET SIN.

—:o:—

CHAPTER XIII.

"Oh, Barnard can take care of himself!" Pera said, with such an air of indifference that Captain Valentine was puzzled.

"And so can Vyvyan. He would be disgusted with any one who said he couldn't," pulling his moustache thoughtfully as he studied her troubled face.

"But don't you see!" twisting about her pocket-handkerchief nervously till the delicate lace was reduced to holes, "Mr. Le Mesurier may go on talking against him behind his back, and Mr. Vyvyan will never know!"

"Le Mesurier's a brute and deserves a kicking; but Vyvyan's the luckiest man alive."

"Why?" looking up at him in surprise.

"Can't you guess?" looking down into her eyes with a jealous flash in his own.

"Happy, when someone is trying to spread the grossest slander that ever was!"

"Happy," he persisted, "when Miss Clifford thinks it worth while to get quite excited about him."

A deep, overpowering blush spread over her neck, and cheek, and brow, and she bent her head to hide it, longing to run away.

"Shouldn't I have done the same for anyone else?" she said, almost fiercely. "I hate injustice."

"So do I!" he said, coolly; "but I always hate it most when a special friend is concerned."

Pera bit her lip.

"There is no question of a special friend."

"Glad to hear it."

"But he is your friend, and you will do your best for him," distracted between her dread of being supposed to be attached to Vyvyan, and her burning desire to save him from harm.

"He was my friend five minutes ago, but I'm not quite sure now."

"You are not going to desert him!" her eyes opening wide under their long lashes.

"Not unless you make me."

"You know I shouldn't do that."

"You are doing your best. The more you entreat me not to, the more likely I am to do it."

"You are joking," twirling her fan impatiently.

"Never was further from it in my life."

"Then please explain."

"Is it necessary? Can't you guess that you've been making me frantically jealous during the last five minutes?"

"Oh, is that all?" with a little laugh of relief.

"You call that nothing? Believe me it's a very unpleasant sensation."

"Then I wouldn't have it."

"How can I help it?" raising his eyebrows. "Will you promise to take the same amount of interest in me if I get in a hole?"

"Oh, certainly, if I happen to hear of it. I am going home directly."

"But your home, I've been told, is not the other end of the earth. I don't mean to lose sight of you just because you vanish to the other side of Warburton."

"But—but we live so quietly. Papa never invites anyone to the house."

"Then I won't wait for an invitation," with his usual audacity. "I'll come as a tourist to see the ruins."

"Ah, so you may; anyone can do that."

"And if I go to the wrong door, and ring at the Gatehouse instead, will you promise to be my guide?"

Pera thought of her father, and hesitated.

"Perhaps Mr. Anthony Graves's friend would object?" watching her narrowly.

She started.

"You mustn't call him that. He mayn't know him at all."

"But I thought you said your cousin did?" looking surprised.

"He had a letter from him. That's all I know."

"When was that?"

"On the morning of the fourth."

"Are you sure of the date?" with sudden interest.

"Yes, quite sure."

Would she ever forget that night of horror and doubt, even if she lived to the age of Methuselah!

"But perhaps you had better not mention it," she added, as she remembered Bernard Vansittart's snatching the scrap of paper from her hand, and his strange, mysterious manner.

"Not mention it?" opening his eyes. "But don't you see the importance of it? Graves disappeared on the third, and this letter received on the fourth might throw some light on his movements. For Vyvyan's sake I would give anything to know where he was that night."

Was it the wind that moved the window curtain, or a hand that clutched it nervously? They were both too much engrossed to notice it, but the curtain shook persistently, and yet there was so little air that even the wax lights remained steady.

For Vyvyan's sake! How the words spurred her on to remember the smallest detail! Bernard mightn't like it, but she didn't mean to keep back anything that could benefit Bertie Vyvyan if it were told.

She fancied herself once more at her window in the turret, startled from her sleep by the noise of voices in the garden below. Again she saw the two forms crossing the slope of grass, one of which she had taken for Bertie himself. Then followed the quarrel. And soon they were out of sight, Vansittart clutching the other man by the arm.

"He couldn't have come to the Gatehouse," she said, after a pause.

"Do you think he did?" in surprise.

"I looked out of window and saw somebody. I can't think who it could have been."

"Was he alone?"

"No, with Bernard Vansittart."

"Mr. Vansittart is your cousin?"

"Yes."

"About what time was this?"

"About two or three in the morning."

"The best way would be to ask your cousin, wouldn't it?"

"He never likes to be asked questions; and perhaps this was a secret, and I oughtn't to have told you," remembering again Bernard's extraordinary conduct when she found him standing by the dungeon.

"I won't breathe a word of it if you don't wish it; but I think Mr. Vandittart ought to be applied to."

"I will write and ask him about it to-morrow, and if he snubs me I needn't care."

"Certainly not. Send him about his business at once if he doesn't behave properly."

"I shall have to send you about your business if you don't take care," said Lady Hargreave, approaching with a smile. "You've engrossed Pera more than half the evening."

"We've been talking business of grave importance."

"Of course, you always do."

"Auntie, you must be tired. Let me play instead of you," said Pera, anxiously.

"No, my dear, you are to dance, but with some one else than Val," smiling, as she turned away.

"Miss Clifford, don't listen to her. My dear old friend has become barbaric."

"She is quite right, but I am too tired to do anything but sit still," subsiding on to the sofa.

"So am I," placing himself by her side. "Don't feel as if I could crawl."

"Miss Clifford, may I have the honour?" and Major Prothero bowed low.

"So sorry, but I'm too tired," looking limp and exhausted.

The Major expostulated, but Pera didn't care much about him, and really had spoken the truth when she pleaded fatigue. So he walked away to find another partner, internally vowing vengeance against his junior officer, Captain Valentine, who seemed to be master of the situation whether dancing or sitting still.

Only a few minutes later, and Vyvyan, having screwed himself up to the point of imagining that he would be wanting in good manners if he failed to ask the lady of the house to dance, stood before his poor, lost love; and half shy, yet half-defiant, asked if she would give him that waltz.

She hesitated, feeling as if she must say "Yes," even if Major Prothero were offended for life.

Her colour came and went, her breath came in a little gasp; whilst he, blind as a bat as to her real feelings, thought she was attempting to manufacture an excuse, and was stung to the quick, just as she got out stammeringly,—

"I'm so sorry, but I've said I was too tired."

He bowed stiffly, muttering,—

"Of course you are engaged. I was a fool to ask you," and walked off with his head in the air.

Eva Haughton dropped her fan right in front of him. It looked like an accident, but nothing was ever more intentional. He picked it up and returned it, intending to take a solitary walk in the garden; but she remarked, with a sigh,—

"I'm nearly suffocated for want of a breath of fresh air," and what could he do but offer his arm?

They went out slowly, with none of the eagerness which characterises lovers' steps when longing for a *tête à tête*; but Pera, watching jealously, felt the last hope die in her heart. They had gone out under the stars, what for but to pledge themselves to each other for better or worse? She was as sure of it as if Bertie himself had told her; and yet she felt that it might have been prevented, if only she had not sent him away angry and disappointed.

Eva Haughton, the only child of Sir John and Lady Haughton, knew as well as possible that her father and mother would be infuriated by a serious flirtation with a detrimental. But she was madly in love with the good-looking Lancer, and she could not give him up, though prudence told her she must, and conscience whispered that she was doing wrong. She was impulsive and unscrupulous, but she was not mercenary, and Vyvyan's comparative poverty was no obstacle in her eyes. She knew instinctively that he loved Pera Clifford, Lady Hargreave's apparently suddenly acquired niece; but the knowledge only spurred her on, jealousy goading her almost beyond the bounds of self-respect.

Silently they walked together under the trees, Vyvyan lost in a most unflattering reverie.

Eva felt vexed and annoyed at his manner, and tried a topic which she knew would rouse him.

"I really think 'the butterfly' of the regiment is caught at last!"

"That has been said scores of times; but he was always free in a couple of months," a melancholy cadence in his voice.

"But this time anyone can see that he is such a willing captive."

"There is nothing in it," he said, with a confidence that exasperated her.

"Miss Clifford is engaged."

"Then I would bet anything that the engagement is broken before the strawberry season is past. Women have loose ideas about fidelity," bitterly.

"I beg your pardon," with unnecessary warmth; "a girl is always faithful to the man she loves."

"A girl is supposed to love the man she has promised to marry."

"Supposed to, perhaps; but very often the promise has been wrung from her against her will, or given in haste. Then, if there is no love to fall back upon, the chain galls, and it once galls be sure it will be broken before many weeks are past."

"If this is your creed I should pity the fellow who had the honour to be engaged to you!"

"You needn't," with a smile straight up into his face, "for I could be faithful always, in spite of poverty, in spite of opposition at home, in spite of shame—if shame could come upon him. I would stick to him like a burr, and never fall him. Oh! Mr. Vyvyan," with a throb in her voice, "don't you believe me?"

"Yes," bending low over her upturned face. "Your love would be a prize worth winning."

Just as her heart was palpitating with expectation there was a step on the gravel path, and Mr. Le Mesurier stood before them, his face livid with rage.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Lady Hargreave begged me to tell you that your carriage has come," he said, sullenly. "I needn't remind you that the dance you promised me has just passed."

"A thousand pardons; but I forgot to look at my fan before we came out. I had all my partners' names scribbled on the sticks."

"One excuse is as good as any other," as the three walked together towards the house. "I dare say now you owe me a grudge for telling you that the carriage has come. As if it were my fault!"

"I didn't want it," with a little excited laugh, "It seems quite idiotic—to drive home and go to bed, when it is such an exquisite night."

"You said you were tired."

"But I'm not now."

"Very flattering to Vyvyan."

"Perhaps it was the night air," as she blushed rosy red, and drew her hand from Vyvyan's arm slowly, as if she were loth to do it.

It lingered in his as she wished him good-night under the rose-crowned porch; and though there were plenty of men eager to put her in the brougham, her last look was for Vyvyan, and her last thought.

Le Mesurier, who loved her with all the sullen passion of his nature, muttered a curse under his breath. It is not too much to say that at that moment he could have killed Vyvyan without remorse.

"I'll do for you yet," he said to himself, as he looked at the young soldier's handsome face, and knew that Eva Haughton's love was won by its beauty.

Rage and jealousy were burning like two flames in his breast, and the wildest ideas of revenge were flashing through his brain.

Thus Bertie Vyvyan had two enemies, both men who were not likely to spare him if the opportunity came for doing him a mischief, and for those who look for one anxiously and unfettered by scruples it generally presents itself sooner or later.

But Pera was standing in the doorway with a wistful look in her large dark eyes, and Vyvyan had no thoughts to spare for Le Mesurier.

"Is Valentine ready?" he asked, pretending to be in a fever to go away.

"No," called out a laughing voice from the dining-room. "Lady Hargreave is feeding the starving."

"That is a hint not to interrupt him," said Pera, with a smile, though her heart was aching so madly. There was something in her manner that struck Vyvyan, and he leant forward on a sudden impulse.

"It is pleasanter in the garden than inside."

Of course she ought to have disregarded the implied invitation, and turned her back with her chin in the air; but she did nothing of the kind. She was very young, and she had given her whole heart to this man. She could not call it back in a hurry, simply because he didn't seem to want it; but she could hide her love and her loss, and go on with a brave smile, as if she were none the worse for it.

Her poor heart beat like so many drums as they walked side by side under the stars, alone together for the first time since that last night in the ruins. What would he say to her now that the opportunity had come? It was he himself and no other this time. Captain Valentine was safely engaged in satisfying the cravings of hunger. The other men were probably doing the same. Still the precious moments were flying and why didn't he speak? She stopped under the arch of roses, where they found her that afternoon.

"Farther on it is too dark; we had better turn back."

"Not so dark as it was in the Castle the last night I saw you at home. Do you remember?"

The question seemed almost an insult. There was no doubt about her remembering. Could she ever forget?

"I remember," she said, quietly. "You promised to come to the woods the next morning, and you pretended that you had to be at parade. It was a sudden change of mind."

"Yes, I changed my mind because of what your cousin told me. He and I very nearly came to blows before we parted." "There, I couldn't put it plainer than that," he thought, to himself. "If the engagement were a fraud she could say so now."

But he forgot that unless you have the clue to its meaning an allusion often falls.

"Did you quarrel about Anthony Graves?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Anthony Graves!" he exclaimed in intense surprise. "What on earth do you know about him?"

"I know there is some mystery about him, and people say the horridest things—that you are glad to get rid of him."

"Never could be a greater mistake. Poor little chap! he has done me a good turn more often than not."

"I should say so to everyone."

"But why? It's nobody's business except my own."

"They make it their business!" eagerly. "They think everyone is as wicked as themselves. Oh! if you had only stopped at the Gatehouse that night, no one would have breathed a word against you!"

"But I didn't do anything dreadful," with a bewildered look. "I simply took a long ride in quite a wrong direction, slept at an inn, and turned up at the barracks late for parade and everything else. Somebody has been taking you in!"

"Did you meet anyone on the road?" her eyes fixed upon his face in her eagerness.

"I really don't know. I wasn't in a mood

to care whether the road was a desert or a crowd. Le Mesurier was pestering me about it, but I really couldn't tell for certain if I saw Anthony Graves or not. But," with a sudden change of manner, which made her heart beat fast, "we are wasting time. I mayn't see you alone again for a century!"

They were standing still under the roses, and their delicious fragrance made the air heavy with its sweetness, whilst all around lay the white moonlight on verandah, wide-spreading lawn, and gabled roof, giving a sacred beauty to a scene that was pretty enough by daylight.

Bertie Vyvyan's face was white with intense feeling, and his eyes glowed with passionate longing.

He was no longer master of himself; the love which had been so pent and restrained burst its bonds. He stretched out his hands involuntarily, and his voice was hoarse with passion.

"Pera, tell me why——"

Her face was white as his—her breath came fast—her lips trembled, and she shook like a branch in the wind; but before her hands could go out to meet his—before he could even finish the question which was hanging on his lips, and on which his fate depended, the other men came in a noisy band across the lawn—Valentine humming a love song from *Carmen*, Le Mesurier adding a bass accompaniment in quite a wrong key.

Like two thieves caught in the act, the lovers started apart, and Pera conquering her emotion, stepped out into the moonlight, as if to show that she was rather glad than not to be interrupted.

Valentine, struck by the beauty of the graceful figure, with the roses forming a background, and the moon shining full on the pretty face, ended his love-song with a low bow, which seemed to make the burden of it a tribute to her charms.

He was most forcibly attracted by her, but he had not reached the stage of sighs and feverish unrest.

He could love and laugh and go away without a pang, knowing that there was a chance of meeting, if he chose to contrive it, not only on the morrow but on the five or six succeeding days if she stayed the promised week.

Therefore, it was with cheerful serenity that he took his leave, walking back to the house by her side, and preventing any private conversation with Vyvyan, all in an unpremeditated fashion, because he had no idea that he was his rival.

Hadn't Vyvyan disclaimed anything of the kind in the most positive manner? And hadn't he already tumbled head over heels into a hopeless flirtation with Eva Haughton? Le Mesurier evidently thought so, for he was looking as sulky as a disappointed bulldog, and so much the better, for he was a brute.

Valentine was disgusted because he had offered a lift home to Major Prothero, and he couldn't very well let the other man trudge all the way back on foot, when they had often crammed five into the dogcart.

Lady Hargreave, with her niece by her side, came to the porch to see the tandem start, and went through the usual display of sensitive nerves, when the leader tried to stand on its own hind legs, and whisk the groom who was standing at his head off his only pair.

"Only his play," laughed Val. "I'll soon take it out of him when I get him on the road. Get in, Le Mesurier—plenty of room."

"Thanks. I won't trouble you."

"Nonsense, man. Look sharp. I can't expect the horses to stand for half-an-hour."

"I am going to walk. I like it best," he called out very decidedly.

"Why didn't you say so before?" grumbled Val, who nevertheless was glad to be rid of him. "All right," to the groom.

Williams let go, the horses darted forward, there were shouts of "Good-bye—pleasantest day ever spent," etc., as he scrambled up behind, and Pera, her voice raised so that Vyvyan at least might hear her, said, with hypocritical approbation,—

"Quite right, Mr. Le Mesurier, safety is better than pleasant company."

The colour mounted to his face as he inwardly wondered why this girl, to whom he had done no harm, should care to have a hit at him.

"It wasn't want of pluck that kept me back, as you kindly insinuate, but want of exercise."

"Is it want of pluck to look after your own skin? I should do it myself."

"It's all very well to say that; but, you know, a woman may be as great a coward as she likes, and no shame to her," he said, sullenly.

"I don't agree with you at all. Cowardice, and falsehood, and treachery are just as bad in a woman as a man."

"You talk as if you had just been meeting with these three great vices," he said, with a slight smile.

Her eyes flashed, her cheeks grew flushed.

"Not quite that; but I happened to overhear one man insinuating the horridest things of another behind his back."

"Ah! eavesdropping was always a woman's failing," he answered, with a sneer. "Good-night, Lady Hargreave; I mustn't keep you up any longer."

"You mustn't say that I was eavesdropping or I'll never speak to you again," cried Pera in hottest wrath.

"It was you said it, not I. I shouldn't have dreamt of it."

"It was an accident. I didn't mean to hear."

"Of course not. Some day, perhaps, you will tell me what you heard, and I shall be able to explain it. Good-night!" he bowed without offering his hand, and she bent her head slightly with the air of an offended queen.

Lady Hargreave shook her head with a look of disapproval.

"My dear, I don't know what you two were talking of, but there is one rule you ought to follow—never make an enemy."

"I hate him!" said Pera, passionately, with a childish stamp of her tiny foot.

"That's very possible," said her aunt, with a yawn, "but you mustn't show it on any account. An enemy is a luxury which few people can afford. However, as the objectionable young man said just now, we'll wait for our explanation. I want to know all about it, but I'm dying to go to bed."

CHAPTER XV.

A few days later Pera was sitting in the drawing-room at Warburton Hall writing a letter to her father, to obtain permission to stay a little longer with her aunt if he were quite sure that he didn't want her.

It was a very pleasant room, furnished with a due regard to comfort as well as taste, with many looking-glasses framed in delicate tinted lace, and hothouse plants grouped gracefully at their base. Large windows opened on to a broad verandah which was completely covered with creepers, and beyond stretched the lawn, smooth as green velvet, with the rosary on the other side, a mass of beautiful blossoms in the height of their perfection.

Pera's pen glided on, and a smile came upon her pretty lips as she thought of her father. Would he be angry or disappointed? Had he begun to miss his little daughter? Her heart felt very soft towards the old place, although she wished to stay in the new. And she could flatter herself that she was doing as much good here as at home, for her aunt said that it made her feel young again to have a young thing about the house, and she had been so kind that Pera was thankful to be able, even in a small way, to make some return.

As she wrote on a little table by the window, her eyes straying from the sheet of paper to the garden where the bees were humming, the butterflies fluttering on their career of conquest and depredation, the birds singing their morning carol of joy, she heard the door open roughly behind her.

Looking over her shoulder after a violent start, she was astonished to see Bernard Vanslittart coming towards her with an ominous frown on his brow, and an uncanny glitter in his eyes, such as she had found there but once before—on the night of the third of June.

Afraid that something dreadful had happened she jumped up from her seat, and asked eagerly if her father were well.

"I don't know, and I don't care," he said, angrily. "I've not come here to talk twaddle about him or anyone else. I want to know what you mean by betraying my secrets, and doing your best to land me at the gallows?"

"Bernard!" she gasped, in breathless amazement.

"Don't Bernard me," fiercely, "but answer my questions. What do you mean by it?"

"You must be mad!" she said, slowly, her hands on the back of her chair, as if she kept it in front of her as a sort of protection, her eyes fixed gravely on his pallid face.

"I'm not mad, and you can't get out of it that way. What did you know of Anthony Graves? And how dared you link our names together?"

"I meant no harm whatever I did; but I won't be bullied," her anger rising after the first panic had passed.

"Don't talk like a child. Do you know this is a matter of life and death? Do you know that if you had been my bitterest enemy you couldn't have played me a worse trick?"

"I never guessed it. I only said when they were talking about him, that you must know him because you had a letter from him. If there was any harm in that, I am sorry for it."

"And you think that will satisfy me?"

"I don't know what more you want," drawing up her neck, and feeling inclined to add, "that's all you'll get," but remembering her aunt's injunction in time to keep it back.

"I suppose in case the worst happened, you would think it must be a supreme consolation to remember that you tried. I'm so sorry!"

"What do you mean by the 'worst'?" she asked, angry at his scorn, and really uneasy at his strange words, "Do you know where Mr. Graves is? And have you helped him to hide him?"

"What devil possesses you?" he exclaimed, fiercely. "I've never seen the fellow for months. I know nothing about him, I swear I don't."

"Your word would be quite enough. Why are you in such a state of mind about him?"

"I wish the fellow were here, he owes me money, and he's evidently keeping dark in order to shirk paying."

"I thought he was the money-lender. I didn't know those people ever borrowed or got into debt, I fancied it was the other way up," she said, quietly, somehow convinced that he was telling her an untruth.

"Perhaps you don't believe me?"

Pera could not tell a falsehood to save her life, so she evaded a direct answer by asking a question instead.

"Don't be disagreeable; you've done nothing but abuse me. Who was the man who was with you on the night of the third?"

"Vyvyan. He wasn't over civil, and took himself off."

"No, no. After Mr. Vyvyan had left," keeping her eyes fixed upon him, through a sudden instinct.

His face changed; from pale it had become actually livid, and his eyes distended as if some ghost had risen before them. He stammered, as he answered, with assumed confidence,—

"Nobody, you are dreaming."

"It was somebody," she persisted; "for I saw him from my window. You were walking together, and then it seemed to me you began to quarrel."

He passed his hand across his forehead with a nervous gesture.

"Never heard such nonsense. Visitors don't usually drop in at two o'clock in the morning."

Pera had not mentioned any hour, and it struck her at once that two o'clock was the exact time at which she had seen the stranger walking by her cousin's side. What could have put it into

"WHO HAS PUT YOU UP TO THIS?" BERNARD ASKED, IN A LOW VOICE.

Vanettart's head, if there had been nothing to mark it!

She felt more and more convinced that he had helped Anthony Graves to disappear, and for Vyvyan's sake she determined to sift the matter to the bottom.

"Casual visitors don't; and it is rather late for an appointment," she said, slowly.

Then he came close up to her, his face still deathly white—with rage or hidden horror.

She constrained herself to stand stock still and face him, whilst inwardly longing to run away, and yet she told herself that this was only "Cousin Bernard," whom she had known from a boy, and she surely couldn't be frightened of him.

"Look here, Pera. Who has put you up to this?" he asked, in a low voice, but every syllable distinctly audible.

She constrained her eyes to meet his, although with an effort.

"Nobody. I saw you and another man with my own eyes. Don't you remember that I followed you?"

He shook his shoulders with a gesture of impatience, which looked very like a shudder.

"I remember," with a frown, as if the remembrance were abhorrent to him, and he would give worlds to shake it off. "But you can't deny that you found me alone!"

"Yes, you were alone then, the man had gone, or you had hidden him. Surely you can trust me, Bernard!"

"No, Delilah, I can't. I call you Delilah, and I mean it," he cried, fiercely. "You want to get rid of me. I'm in your way. You will sell me to-day—this very minute—if the price were Vyvyan's safety." He gripped her shoulder tight, with a nervous clutch. "Listen to me," lowering his voice again, but speaking with terrible earnestness. "There is only one way to muzzle you—a wife can't bear evidence against her husband in criminal cases. Do you understand?"

"No. Take your hand away, you are hurting me," shrinking from him as far as she could.

"I wouldn't hurt you, child, for anything," his face softening. "But I don't like the look of things. What with your blabbing, and the confounded meddling of other people, they might pounce on the wrong man, and not find out their mistake till—till the rope had done its work. Look here, child, we've grown up side by side like two plants, in the same garden. I've known you ever since you could toddle. Don't you remember the games we used to play together? You were the Sleeping Beauty, and I was the Prince, or you were Amy Robsart, and I was Leicester. You can't know anyone half so well as me, and you used to be fond of me, that I could swear."

He released her shoulder, but caught her hands in his, and held them fast, whilst she struggled hard to free herself, absolutely afraid of the passionate glow in his eyes.

"Pera!" his voice rising with the force of his appeal, "I've loved you all my life; you can't throw me over now."

"Oh, hush! I've always been fond of you," trying to pull her hands away with redoubled energy; "indeed, Bernard, I have," with a deprecating smile; "but I've always thought of you as a brother—nothing more, and nothing less."

"A brother!" the intensest scorn ringing out in his tone. "By Heaven, Pera, I'll be more, or that lover of yours shall pay for it. Now, darling!" his voice changing to the utmost tenderness; "forget my harsh words; I was half mad when I came in. I never loved anyone but you, and I must be loved in return. Look at me!" There was such an imploring accent in his voice, that she turned her head.

"It's no use, Bernard; I——," but before she could utter another word his feverish lips were pressed to hers, his arms were cast round her in a passionate embrace.

Then the fierce instinct of insulted maidenhood rose up within her, and she wrenched herself away from him with the exertion of all her strength.

Panting with indignation she retreated towards the open window, and found herself face to face with Bertie Vyvyan.

The horror of that moment she never forgot.

Of course he mistook the flush of anger for the blush of confusion, and his face was stern as death, as he bowed stiffly.

"Pera, Mr. Vyvyan has come over to tell us—— Oh! Bernard I didn't know you were here!" said Lady Hargreave, as she came slowly under the shade of the verandah with a parasol in her hand, and caught sight of Vanettart.

Pera scarcely took in what passed after that; she only found after a few minutes that Vyvyan was gone, and that her aunt seemed surprised, for she said he had just consented to stay to luncheon.

"Oh! If Bernard hadn't come, what a happy afternoon we might have spent together!" she moaned to herself, as she fled upstairs with her burning cheeks. "And now he'll never speak to me again."

(To be continued.)

An electrician in charge of a generating station in a country town reports that, being troubled a good deal with mice, he thought he would try what effect electricity would have on them; so he arranged two metal plates, one slightly above and beyond the other, and to each he connected a wire. On the upper plate was placed the bait in such a manner that the mouse to get it would come over the lower plate, his body completing the circuit between the two pieces of metal. Although the appliance was rudely constructed, it demonstrated its efficiency in numerous cases. A similar device was tried on the ground squirrels which are a pest in his neighbourhood, resulting in the electrocution of those that attempted to feed upon it.

"THIS IS A CHEQUE FOR TEN POUNDS, SIGNED BY MY NEPHEW'S EMPLOYER," SAID HEALY.

THE MISTRESS OF LYNWOOD.

—:o:—

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The absence of Isabel Farquhar from London was felt by Hugh Cleveland as making a very perceptible gap in his life, for he had grown more dependent on her society than he had been aware of.

Nevertheless, on the whole he was glad she was gone, for he had almost grown to fear her wily fascination, and there was a certain sense of relief in being beyond the sphere of its influence. Not, be it understood, that he had in any way forgotten Nathalie, or that she was less to him than she had ever been, but Isabel had contrived to exercise a certain sway over his intellect, although she had entirely failed in her efforts to touch his heart.

Still, his life was certainly duller now that he no longer spent his evenings in De Vere Gardens, and he felt himself sinking into the same state of despondency into which he had fallen immediately before the commencement of their intimacy.

On the night that Farquhar met with his tragic end, Hugh went to bed with his thoughts naturally dwelling on Nathalie's approaching marriage, which he knew was fixed to take place the next day, and it is small wonder that he should have lain awake for some time thinking of her, or that his dreams—when sleep finally visited him—should have been almost exclusively of the woman he still loved, in spite of her supposed treachery.

Towards morning a dream, more vivid than he ever before remembered to have experienced, made a great impression on him. He thought he saw Nathalie, standing at the altar, in the white robes of a bride, that were, however, stained with a deep red mark which he knew to be blood. Her face was pale, her eyes were haggard, and as she saw him, she stretched forth her hands to him in most pitiful appeal.

"Hugh! Hugh! why are you not here to help me!" He woke up with the cry ringing in his ears, and so vivid had been the vision, that for some moments he really did not know whether he was sleeping or awake.

He looked round bewilderedly, and his eyes fell on the familiar things in his bedroom, lighted up by the morning sunshine.

"What a fool I am!" he exclaimed, springing up, and preparing for his bath. "The sound of that cry haunts me still."

And it continued to haunt him, although he did his best to laugh himself out of the idea. He had somehow received the impression that Nathalie was in trouble and in need of his help, and it had taken too firm a hold upon him to be lightly shaken off.

As he was sitting at the breakfast table, making a sorry pretence of eating, a sudden notion came to him, and he started up in his excitement.

"I will go and see her married!" he exclaimed aloud. "The church will be free to everyone, and there is no reason why I should not be there."

He took up a time-table, and consulted it. Yes, by setting off at once, he could reach Paddington in time to catch the early train, which would land him at W——at half-past ten. He could then take a conveyance and get to King's Dene before the ceremony commenced.

No sooner had he made this resolve, than—without giving himself time to consider its wisdom—he put on his hat, went out, sprang into a hansom, and half-an-hour later was on his way to the Midlands, wondering whether he was doing a very foolish thing in thus yielding to a sudden impulse.

However, foolish or not, he would go on with it now; and so, when he reached W——, he took a cab with the most likely-looking horse he could see, and was driven to the village of King's Dene, where he dismissed his driver and walked towards the church.

The aspect of the village struck him; it was excited, but not in the way he had expected see it. Little groups of men and women had formed in the street, and were talking together, but they all looked solemn and downcast—more as if they were discussing a funeral than anticipating a wedding. There were no flags or triumphal arches, only at one spot a sort of scaffolding had been erected, meant to be covered with flowers and evergreens, but destitute of both, and looking gaunt and uncanny in its nakedness.

Hugh thought once of stopping to ask the meaning of this, but he did not wish to call attention to himself, and so went on until he came to the church. There, to his intense surprise, he found himself confronted by locked doors, and the melancholy sound of the passing bell broke on his ears, instead of the wedding chimes he had fancied would greet them.

A sudden horror fell upon him, and he staggered back in the sunshine and laid hold of the handle of the door for support. Could Nathalie be dead, and was the bell tolling for her?

A moment later, and he recovered himself, and looked round to see if there was anyone near, whom he could ask for news of what had happened. His eyes fell on an old man digging industriously at a grave, a few paces away, and he went towards him.

"Is not this Miss Egerton's wedding day?" he asked, and the gravedigger looked up from his work, and leaned on his spade, as if preparing himself for a good gossip.

"It was to have been—but she couldn't very well be married without a bridegroom, could she now?" he responded, with a certain grim humour, that his hearer was in no mood to appreciate.

"Without a bridegroom! What do you mean?"

"Why haven't you heard what has chanced to the rich London banker that was to have been her husband!"

"I have heard nothing," impatiently. "I have only just arrived from town. What is it?"

"Why, he was shot last night, and they do say"—lowering his voice, as if fearful lest the

tenants of the graves should hear him—"they do say that it was Miss Nathalie as murdered him."

"What!"

The old man nodded his head.

"Yes. It's a rum thing to say of a lady, isn't it! But it's true for all that, and directly after the inquest, they'll take her to W——gaol, for everybody expects the jury will bring in a verdict of 'wilful murder,' agen her. It's a sad come-down for the Egertons, but pride must have a fall, and she was allays a proud young 'oman—that Miss Nathalie."

Hugh could hardly believe the evidence of his own senses. Nathalie, his haughty, imperious, beautiful love, accused of a crime like this, and in danger of a felon's prison. The thought was horror itself, and yet this man would hardly have imagined it, and therefore it must be true.

It was some moments before he recovered his self-possession; then he left his informant without a word, and strode from the churchyard in the direction of King's Dene, agitated by a thousand strange emotions.

The house looked singularly deserted, and he walked into the hall unchallenged. There he met a footman.

"I want to see Miss Egerton," he said.

The man looked embarrassed, and Hugh took from his pocket a sovereign, and slipped it into his hand.

"Take me to her room, or wherever she is, and I will risk being allowed to enter," he said, quietly, partially understanding the situation.

The gold did not fail of its usual magic, and Hugh found himself outside Nathalie's dressing-room door. There he was confronted by White, who asked him what his business was. When he made known his request, the detective shook his head.

"I cannot let you see her, sir," he said firmly, but just then, an incident happened that took the initiative out of his hand. Nathalie, hearing a voice she recognised, had come from her boudoir through the dressing-room, and now stood on the threshold, white and haggard as Cleveland had seen her in his dream.

"You have come, Hugh!" she cried wildly, and in that moment she forgot that they had ever parted, she forgot the hard words he had said, the harder things he believed, of her, and only remembering that she loved and trusted him, she flung herself into his arms, weeping hysterically, and quite regardless of the presence of a third person.

White had not altogether dropped the man in the detective, and accustomed as he was to painful scenes, this one touched him deeply in its pathos, which the youth and beauty of Nathalie naturally served to heighten. He turned aside, and Hugh not waiting for any further permission, drew the girl inside the dressing-room, and thence to the boudoir.

"I thought—I felt, you would come to me," she breathed, when they were alone.

Hugh's heart beat quickly. In spite of all, he knew by her present manner that she had never ceased to love him, and the knowledge, even under these miserable circumstances, was like a draught of life's purest elixir.

"Tell me everything that has happened," he said, taking her hand, and holding it in a strong firm clasp that seemed to strengthen her.

"Yes," she answered, "events have occurred which make it no longer necessary that I should hide anything from you; the seal is removed from my lips now."

And then she told him the whole history of her engagement to Farquhar, and the conditions under which it was entered into. At this point he interrupted her.

"Then you loved me all the time, and it was for your father's sake you became Farquhar's promised wife?"

"Yes," simply.

He kissed her with fervent passion.

"Thank Heaven for that! Now go on."

She related every circumstance that had occurred the preceding night, and Hugh looked graver, and still more grave as the recital proceeded, for he saw clearly enough that the circumstantial evidence was, as White had said, terribly against her.

As she finished, Nathalie looked at him anxiously—all her doubts, engendered by Isabel's words, had faded into nothingness under the influence of his presence, and she felt now as if nothing had ever happened to interrupt the course of their love.

"Nathalie," he said, keeping a firm hold of her hands, and returning her gaze, "if you were weak and frivolous like the generality of girls, I might be tempted to make light of this matter—or at least, try and persuade you that it was not so serious, as regards yourself, as it really is. But I know that you, who have borne the burdens of others, are also capable of bearing your own, and I tell you candidly that things look very black against you. Mind, I do not wish you to think for one moment that you are really in danger of condemnation for a crime of which you are innocent, as there are surely ways of bringing the guilty to justice; but it is necessary that something should be done without delay towards clearing up the mystery."

They were both silent for some five or ten minutes, Nathalie had an implicit faith in Hugh's talent and energy, and already felt as if half her burden had been lifted from her shoulders, while he was quite conscious of the responsibility cast upon him.

"There is no news of my brother and Lady Lynwood," Nathalie said; "do you think their disappearance has any connection with poor Mr. Farquhar's murder?"

Hugh shook his head. He did not know either Lionel or Adrienne very intimately, and being unacquainted with their characters, was inclined to put the same construction on their flight as the rest of the world would probably put.

"No," he said, "my opinion is the same as your own, namely, that some enemy of Farquhar's tracked him down here on purpose to execute his murderous design, and the point will be to follow up the slightest clue that may present itself. For that, we shall require the services of a detective."

"Will not some man from W—— do?"

"No; in such a case you want one who is thoroughly accustomed to his work, and not a local celebrity who has rarely had any responsibilities beyond arresting a drunkard, or an apprentice who has robbed his master's till. I think I know a fellow who will do—not a particularly respectable member of society, but as sharp as a needle, and, what is more, devoted to his profession. Yes, I don't know than I can do better than telegraph to him at once." Hugh pulled his watch from his pocket and glanced at it. "It is not much after twelve now, and if I send at once he will get the message in time to catch the two o'clock down train. By-the-bye"—lowering his voice—"do you know for what hour the inquest is fixed?"

"It is to begin at two exactly."

"And will be held here?"

"Yes, in the library."

"You will be called as a witness?"

"So White says, but he also tells me I need not give evidence unless I like."

"But of course you will!" exclaimed Hugh in alarm. "To decline giving evidence would be almost fatal to you in the present aspect of affairs."

"I am aware of it, so I shall tell everything I know without reserve." She paused a moment, then added, "The coroner's jury will give their verdict on the evidence produced this afternoon?"

"Probably," answered Hugh.

"And it will be one of 'Wilful murder against Nathalie Egerton'?"

He turned away unable to answer this question. She had spoken quite firmly, and now she laid her hand on his arm, and forced him to look at her.

"I am not afraid, Hugh," she said, softly. "Providence will surely protect the innocent, and as a matter of fact, I am far more concerned on my brother's behalf than on my own—if I could only hear that he had returned I should feel, comparatively speaking, at rest. Will you go and make what inquiries you can about him?"

"My poor darling, they would be of no avail. Can't you see, it is the old tale of man's love and woman's weakness, over again?"

"No, no!" she cried, passionately, "I will not—I cannot believe it! Lionel is the soul of honour, and Adrienne is purity itself—I would rather believe harm of an angel than of her!"

Hugh looked unconvinced—as he felt.

"I will make what inquiries I can," he said; "but has not your father already done so?"

"Yes, but with a negative result. The only thing he can find out is that a vehicle was waiting some distance outside the lodge gates, and that two people were seen to get in it and drive away, but as it was dusk it was impossible to recognise them. He is of opinion that these two were Lionel and Adrienne, while I am sure that further inquiries will prove this not to be the case."

"Well, I will investigate as much as I can, but it will not be this afternoon, for it is imperatively necessary that I should be present at the inquest and hear all that is said, in order that I may form my own opinion upon the manner of the different witnesses, and report it in full to Healy—that is the detective I am going to get down here. And that reminds me, darling, that I must lose no time in sending the telegram, so I will leave you for awhile. Good-bye, my own love, don't lose courage, for I will save you yet."

He took her in his arms and held her close against his heart, and not even the sense of her peril had power to rob the caress of its sweetness, as his lips met hers in one long, passionate kiss.

And it was at this moment that the door was thrown open, and looking up simultaneously, they beheld standing on the threshold—Isabel Farquhar.

CHAPTER XI.

Mr. Josiah Healy, the man to whom Hugh Cleveland sent a telegram demanding his presence, was, as the artist remarked, not exactly a respectable member of society; that is to say, he spent a good deal of time and money in public houses, was not unknown in "the ring," and associated with people who could hardly come under the heading of "shabby genteel."

But this was in his idle moments, and when he had just come into possession of a good haul, as the result of some lucky stroke of business. In his business hours, the man was so different that he could hardly have been recognised as the same person. Keen, sober, alert, few things were permitted to escape his notice, and it may almost be said, that for these qualities, joined to an untiring ardour and a wiry physique that never showed signs of fatigue, he stood at the head of his profession.

Like most of us, Mr. Healy had one soft place in his heart, and it was occupied by the orphan son of his dead sister, a young man of three-and-twenty, who was clerk in a city warehouse, and who had lately given him a good deal of trouble for he had fallen in with bad companions, and as a natural result had wandered from that strict path of virtue, which his uncle, however widely he himself might diverge from it, desired him to pursue.

It was of this young man he was thinking as he sat in his small, untidy room, on the morning of Hugh Cleveland's departure for King's Dene, and his thoughts, to judge from the frown on his forehead, were not pleasant ones.

The detective was a small, lithe, clean-shaven man, with pale grey eyes and fair complexion, which, in spite of his mode of living, he had contrived to keep fresh and rosy—his hair inclined to sandy, and there was an innocent, surprised sort of expression on his face that made people fancy him extremely simple-minded. He had, moreover, a habit of half-closing those pale grey eyes of his, and putting his head on one side while meditating, that

gave him a curious and comical resemblance to a parrot.

"I wish I could just drop on that Phineas Hyam!" he muttered savagely, after re-reading a letter he had in his hand; "he's ruined a good many men, and he'll ruin this poor lad of mine if I don't look out. I suppose there's nothing for it but to go and see him, and square matters with him this time, at all events."

He took up his hat, and ran his fingers through his hair, by way of setting his toilet to rights, and was just on the point of opening the door when he heard the double "rat-tat" of a telegraph boy downstairs, and a minute after a message was brought him by a small and extremely dirty female child who was the "slavey" of the establishment.

He was accustomed to these sort of orange-coloured envelopes, so he opened it with professional coolness, and having mastered its contents, threw it in the grate, and at once consulted a time-table.

It need hardly be said the dispatch was from Hugh, and requested the detective's immediate presence at King's Dene.

"I shan't be able to catch the two o'clock train, for I must see Hyam before I go," said Healy to himself, after he had looked at the time-table; "but there is one an hour later, and I think I can manage that."

He wired a reply to Hugh, and then set off briskly for a small street in Westminster, where Mr. Phineas Hyam's abode was situated, and having reached it, was ushered into a small back room, littered over with papers, that apparently served the Jew as an office.

"Mr. Hyam is engaged just now, but he won't be long if you'll stay," said the boy who let him in, and the detective seated himself on a very rickety chair, and prepared himself to await, with what patience he might, the advent of the money-lender.

Mr. Healy had a peculiarity, well-known to his friends—he could not sit still, and his curiosity was so insatiable that it expended itself on the smallest minutiæ, when it had not larger matters to feed upon.

In the present instance his eyes roved restlessly round, and at last fell on a small heap of paper, torn into tiny atoms, lying on the floor at his feet. He shook his head in disapproval.

"A mistake to tear up letters that you don't wish to be seen," he remarked, sententiously; "there are no pieces so small but what they may be joined, if one takes time and trouble over the task. The only sure way is to burn them."

He bent down and picked up the morsels, and, by a singular coincidence, the first two he pieced together formed the words "King's Dene" in a very peculiar handwriting—a man's.

"That's odd," he muttered, "for King's Dene is the very place I am going to this afternoon. I wonder who Mr. Phineas knows down there."

His professional experience had taught him one fundamental truth—namely, that there is no scrap of evidence too small to be passed over. However trivial, however seemingly unimportant a coincidence may be, it may yet find a place in the chain of circumstances, where every link has its appointed place, and where one weak place may spoil the whole.

Healy hardly thought it likely that these atoms of paper could have any connection with the case, upon which he would shortly be engaged, nevertheless, with the instinct of caution that never failed him, he swept them into an envelope and put them in his pocket, determining to examine them at his leisure.

He had hardly accomplished this operation before the door opened, and Mr. Hyam came in.

"Ah! good morning, Healy; I hope I see you well," he said, with an unctuous smile. "I expected you this morning."

"Indeed! Well, it is no particular satisfaction to me to come," was the ungracious retort.

"I daresay not. How's business?"

"Bad—since it has brought me to your house."

The Jew laughed, as if amused.

"Ha—ha! You are funny," he observed. "I suppose you have come for the purpose of settling that little matter of your nephew's!"

"Yes; and not only that, but to warn you it's the last time I will settle such 'little matters.' If you lend that boy any more money, you may whistle for its repayment—you won't get it from me."

Hyam shrugged his shoulders, and produced a greasy pocket-book, from which he took some papers.

"The amount, principal and interest, comes to a hundred and fifty pounds," he said.

The detective almost started from his chair.

"What!"

"A hundred and fifty pounds," repeated Hyam, coolly.

"But Alfred told me he had only borrowed fifty pounds from you."

"Well—that amount, at cent. per cent. and expenses, comes to what I tell you."

"I shall not pay it, then," said Healy, firmly. "I am willing to give you fifty pounds, and five per cent. interest, but not a farthing more. A hundred and fifty pounds! When did you think it likely that boy would repay you, seeing that he only gets ninety pounds a year for salary!"

"I knew I should get it," returned Hyam.

"Yes—from me. But you don't know the man you are dealing with, for I'll see you d——d before I'll let you swindle me in this fashion. Don't you think I know it's entirely through you that Alfred has gone wrong! It was you who first put into his head the idea of betting, and introduced him to a lot of scoundrels who make their living out of poor boys like him, and now you've got all you can out of him, you come to me for the rest. Well, you can take out a summons against me, or him, or who you like, and then see if you'll get your cent. per cent. interest!"

Mr. Healy was excited, contrary to his wont. A bright pink flushed his cheek, and there was a vibration in his usually quiet voice that announced severe mental disturbance. And, indeed, this intelligence of Hyam's was calculated to disturb him, for he had no means of raising a hundred and fifty pounds at his command even if he acknowledged the debt.

Hyam watched him as a cat may watch the struggles of a mouse which she knows cannot escape her sharp claws.

"Look here," he said, withdrawing one paper from the rest and holding it up, but taking care not to lose it. "Do you see what this is?"

"It is a cheque for ten pounds, signed by Samuel Morrison—my nephew's employer."

"Purporting to be signed by him. Look at the signature well."

Healy did so, and his face changed, all the ruddy colour fading out of it.

"It is a forgery," he said, almost below his breath.

"Yes; it is a forgery; and by your nephew."

Healy did not attempt to deny the charge; indeed, directly he examined the signature he suspected the truth.

"How did it come into your possession?" he asked, with a gasp.

"I cashed it for Alfred."

"But you knew it was not genuine?"

"Yes, I knew that."

The two men looked at each other, then Hyam said, with a disagreeable smile,—

"You see, it is not simply a case of a summons, but a matter of felony — penal servitude, maybe."

"You villain!" cried Healy. "If ever a man deserved penal servitude, you do. The only thing for me will be to get Alfred away from London, and out of your clutches, before you lead him into further mischief. You took that cheque because you knew I would pay it rather than see him led to prison; but it is the last time, as you'll find out."

"Let us come to business; I have no time to spare arguing with you," said the money-lender, with an assumption of impatience. "I suppose you'll give me the hundred and fifty now, as well as the amount of this cheque, and something over."

"I can't at the present moment, for the simple reason that I only possess fifty pounds in the world."

"Well, we must come to some arrangement for a future settlement, then. You can pay me the fifty pounds in cash, and give me bills for the rest, coming due at different dates; and in return I'll hand you over this cheque and your nephew's acceptances. I think"—with a grin—"you will confess I am very lenient with you, but it's only because I'm sorry for the distress I know that young Alfred has caused you."

Healy looked at him with a peculiar light in his grey eyes, but he did not say anything; indeed, he saw that he was entirely in the Jew's power, unless he permitted his nephew to be convicted as a felon, so the less said the better.

He agreed to the proposed arrangement, and came away with the cheque and acceptance in his pocket; but once outside the door, he turned and looked back at the house,—

"I owe you a debt, Mr. Phineas Hyam"—and he swore a great oath—"I'll be even with you, yet!"

That same afternoon he was on his way to King's Dene, and during the journey he amused himself by piecing and pasting together the fragments of paper he had picked up in the Jew's office.

CHAPTER XLI.

Hugh Cleveland came to W—— Station to meet the detective, with whom he had a more or less intimate acquaintance, which had been commenced by the artist procuring a situation in a friend's office for Healy's nephew—a service that had been repaid with much gratitude on the part of both uncle and nephew.

As they drove from the station towards King's Dene, Hugh gave an outline of the case, and such particulars as he thought necessary, and was listened to with deep attention by his companion, who, however, made no notes—one of his peculiarities was a marvellous memory that hardly anything ever escaped.

"The inquest," continued Hugh, "was held this afternoon at two o'clock, and the verdict was one of 'Wilful Murder' against Miss Egerton, who has since accompanied White to W——, and is now in the county gaol there."

He exercised very great self-command, but in spite of all his efforts, he could not prevent part of the deep emotion under which he spoke finding its way to his voice. His love and pity for the proud girl, who found herself so terribly humiliated had made him suffer even more keenly than she did, when she was led away from her home—which she was that day to have quitted as a bride—in order to be incarcerated in a prison. He had accompanied her, speaking words of tenderest sympathy, which, however, fell on deaf ears, for Nathalie's fortitude had, in a measure, given way when she heard that terrible verdict, and a state of apathy followed that almost amounted to despair.

She was only conscious that she, who had held her head so high, she, who had done so much in order to preserve the stainlessness of her name, was now the one through whom it was dishonoured, and that she was placed in a position such as no woman of her race had ever been placed in before.

The horror of it was too much for her, and if death would have come at her call she had surely died during those moments of wretched degradation.

True she had partly anticipated the result of the inquest, but we none of us know how much of hope remains with us until the last vestige is torn away by a certainty of evil, and although she had tried to prepare herself for the worst, she had, as a matter of fact, trusted in some unforeseen evidence being forthcoming which would exculpate her from suspicion.

But this was not the case, and Isabel Farquhar's evidence—given with a virulent bitterness that Hugh Cleveland's presence accentuated—was, of itself, almost sufficient to convict her in the eyes of the twelve men who were trying to find out the truth concerning Gilbert Far-

quhar's death. Any other verdict than the one given would have been impossible under the circumstances.

"Before you go any further," said Hugh, after he had told his story, "I wish you to be thoroughly convinced on your own part of Miss Egerton's innocence."

"Such a conviction is not necessary, sir," responded the detective, cynically, "whether innocent or guilty I should do my best for any client."

"Yes, but I had rather you started from true premises instead of false ones, and I repeat, she knows no more of this crime than I do myself. Now tell me what you think of the case."

"It is a mysterious one," said Healy, slowly and thoughtfully; "and," he continued with an air of prospective enjoyment, "it promises to be interesting. I do not conceal from you that the lady's position is a very grave one, and unless fresh evidence turns up in the meantime, it is quite certain that a true bill will be brought in against her at the next Assizes, and that she will have to take her trial on the capital charge. In that case the verdict of the jury will probably be the same as that of the coroner."

Hugh shuddered, and was silent.

"You see the facts are dead against her, and there is hardly a link missing in the chain of evidence," continued Healy. "First of all, it is not denied that she engaged herself to a man she disliked for the sake of preserving her father's estates, which could only be done by a marriage with Mr. Farquhar; then, on the eve of the wedding, he presented her with the mortgage he held over them, so that the motive for the marriage no longer existed, but, all the same, matters had advanced so far, that she felt the impossibility of going back at the last moment, though there is no reason to suppose that she was any the more reconciled to the idea of becoming his wife. She goes out for a walk with him, comes back alone, soon after a shot has been fired, meets her father and Miss Farquhar, and is observed by them to be agitated. She will not wait for her lover to join them, but hurries into the house and pretends to laugh at all ideas of harm having befallen him, although she says she promised to meet her at the gate of the plantation. All this looks bad, but when we come to the discovery of the pistol which both Mr. Egerton and Miss Farquhar indentify as the one given to his *fiancée* by the dead man, the case grows darker and darker."

"But there were a pair of pistols exactly alike," interrupted Hugh; "the solicitor employed by Mr. Egerton at the inquest cross-examined Miss Farquhar and ascertained this fact."

"Yes, but I understand that Mr. Farquhar said he had lost the other one before he came to King's Dene."

The artist acknowledged this to be true.

"But," he continued, "Miss Egerton declares most emphatically that she saw her own pistol in her room after her return from the wood."

"And you think her word is to be trusted? She is not labouring under a delusion?"

"I am sure of it. She is not the sort of girl to cherish delusions, or make mistakes of that kind, for she has the clearest and strongest head of any woman I ever came across, and I would trust her word implicitly."

"Then, if that is the case, the murderer must have used the second pistol. But how do you account for the sudden disappearance of the one belonging to Miss Egerton?"

"I cannot account for it, neither can she; it is an unfathomable mystery, for it is as though it had been spirited away."

"At all events, granting that Miss Egerton has not made a mistake, it must have been taken between the time she saw it in her drawer and when her maid went up to fetch it down, and so someone in the house must be responsible for having it. Has this same maid any spite against her mistress?"

"The very question I asked Nathalie. But she said 'No, they had been on excellent terms.'"

"Is there any other member of the household who would like to injure Miss Egerton?"

"No," said Hugh; but his manner was so hesitating that the detective looked at him with sharp interrogation.

"I hope you are not keeping anything back from me, Mr. Cleveland?" he observed, gravely. "I cannot work in the dark, remember."

"Well, then, I believe Miss Farquhar hates Miss Egerton, and would not hesitate to injure her if she had the chance."

The detective rubbed his hands.

"We have all the elements of a drama here—two women at rivalry with each other," he muttered in a pleased tone. "You have given me a clue. I suppose I am to take up my quarters at King's Dene for the present?"

"Certainly. Mr. Egerton is most anxious that you should be on the spot, and I also shall remain in this house for the present."

Directly after his arrival and introduction to Mr. Egerton, the detective requested that gentleman to accompany him to the plantation and point out the exact spot where Farquhar's body had lain—an easy enough task, for the ground still bore traces of its ghastly burden.

He examined the moss, the bridge, every tree and shrub that grew around with the minute care of an Indian on the look out for a trail, and paid especial attention to the hollow of the tree in which the pistol had been found.

When he declared he had thoroughly mastered the geography of the plantation, and they proceeded to the gate where Isabel and Miss Egerton had waited the night before, the latter said,—

"You have not done much good by your reconnoitre; that is to say, you have found nothing likely to be of any assistance to you?"

Healy smiled, and drew from his breast pocket an envelope, from which he took a cartridge-case and a tiny piece of black material.

"I have found these," he replied, "and I think them of sufficient importance to fully repay my trouble. You observe the cartridge-case has the maker's name on it, and as I picked it up close to the spot where Mr. Farquhar fell, I have no doubt that it was in the revolver that shot him. However, that can easily be proved, for I will go to W—— and see if it fits."

"And the bit of black stuff,—where did you find that?" queried Hugh.

"It was caught in a piece of projecting bark just outside the orifice of the tree in which the pistol was discovered, and as it is part of a woman's sleeve it tends to show that it must have been a woman who dropped the pistol there. Now, if I can only find the gown from which that piece of stuff was torn it will be a very important item; indeed, I shall consider it of the utmost importance, for it will be a piece of circumstantial evidence that nothing can get over."

"Unless," added Cleveland, "it happened to have been caught in the tree before last night."

"I do not think that was the case, for if you remember, we had a very heavy storm of rain the night before last, and you will observe that this bit of stuff is apparently quite fresh—almost new, in fact. Now, regarding the entrances and exits of this plantation, is there another at this end, besides this gate?"

"Yes," answered the Squire, "there is a gate some distance to the right there, which gives access to the old part of King's Dene; indeed, it opens nearly opposite the refectory, and close to the servants' wing."

"And would it take a longer or shorter time to get from the site of the murder to that gate than to this one?"

"It would take less time—some three or four minutes less—because that path cuts across a corner, whereas this one describes a curve."

Healy nodded energetically, as if Mr. Egerton's words confirmed him in some previously formed idea.

"Now," he said, "please give me a list of all the women in your household, together with the date of their entry into your family, and also everything you know of their antecedents."

The Squire did so, Healy making notes—contrary to his custom.

"Then you really have only one servant who has not been with you some years, and that is Miss Egerton's maid?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where she came from, and what her name is?"

"Her name is Warren; but I know no more about her than that, for my daughter had everything to do with engaging her."

"Was she called as a witness to-day?"

"Yes; she gave evidence to the effect that she had seen the revolver in her mistress's possession, and she believed it was like the one produced. She asked me if it would be necessary for her to appear as a witness before the magistrates, and, of course, I told her it would."

"I should like to see her," said Healy. "Do you think it can be managed without arousing her suspicions as to my profession?"

"We will try; but from the little I have noticed, I fancy she is a sharp sort of woman, from whom it would be difficult to conceal anything."

Fortune favoured them, for as they entered the hall Warren was crossing it, and the Squire stopped her.

"I wish to express my approval of the way you spoke this afternoon, Warren," he said. "Of course you could not help the fact that what you said was not in my poor daughter's favour, but you did what you could to help her case."

"I was truly sorry to say as much as I did, sir," returned the woman, her low, even tones as composed as usual, while her eyes rested for an instant on Hugh and the detective; "but I only answered the questions put to me, and I could not help doing that. I suppose it would not do for me to go away, so as not to appear before the magistrates?"

"It would do no good whatever; besides"—the Squire drew himself up—"neither my daughter nor myself fear the truth. It is that which is not true that will injure us."

Warren dropped a half curtsey, and went on, while the others passed into the dining-room, and again the whole of the ground was gone over, Mr. Egerton narrating his version of what had taken place.

"But you have heard all this before!" exclaimed Hugh, impatiently, for it seemed to him they were losing time.

"I know I have, sir; but it was Miss Egerton's account, given through you, and I want somebody else's as well. I like to see the case as it presents itself to other people. Now, I have a great desire to search this Warren's boxes. Cannot she be got out of the way for an hour?"

The Squire was rather aghast at the proposal; but Hugh suggested that the maid should be despatched to W—— with a change of apparel for Nathalie, and, this being done, he and the detective went to Warren's room, and, by the aid of a bunch of keys Healy carried with him, the small trunk containing her worldly goods was searched, as well as the apartment itself, but with a negative result.

The box only held a scanty stock of clothing—there were not even any letters; and although Healy examined the gowns carefully he could not find one whose fabric corresponded with the material of the piece in his possession. When they returned downstairs he confessed himself disappointed.

"Nevertheless, I have not altogether wasted the time," he declared, "for I have discovered two things about this woman—firstly, that she is very cautious, and destroys all her papers; and, secondly, that she was quite prepared for having her room searched. It bore traces of having been put in order with that view. My next move will be to see Miss Egerton herself."

"To-morrow morning, I suppose?"

"No, this evening. It will not do for me to let the grass grow under my feet, for in a case of this kind everything depends on expedition. Why, even while I am talking to you now, chances of clearing up the mystery may be slipping away from me."

This expedition accorded so well with Cleveland's own views that he immediately ordered the dog-cart, and said he would himself drive the detective to W——.

When they were on their way Healy somewhat surprised him by asking all particulars concerning Lionel and Lady Lynwood, with whose disappearance he had, of course, been acquainted—indeed, his interest in the Lynwood family generally seemed very great, and he was especially anxious to know all there was to be known regarding Otho.

"Do you think Lionel Egerton or his companion could throw any light on the murder?" asked Hugh.

"I don't know; but I think it will be worth my while to try and discover their whereabouts," was the reply.

(*To be continued.*)

THE TRAGEDY OF LOVE.

—:o:—

(*Continued from page* 537.)

"By doing your duty to him," she answered, pointing to where John, now that the excitement which had buoyed him up for his journey was past, had fallen back insensible in the chair he occupied.

They moved him then to an upper room, Lady Augusta remaining until Mrs. Percival returned to say she had sent for Dr. Manton, Mabel in the meanwhile watching by his side, and then she extended her hand to Marion, whose tears flowed afresh with gratitude.

"May the Heaven that has been so good to me bless your ladyship," she said; but Lady Augusta turned aside, that she might not see the terrible grief that was making her look so old in the best of her years. "Good-bye," the only words she uttered when, after awhile, she left Marion watching; and her own heart, even in its new-born gladness, ached for the other's grief, as she saw her, with unsteady steps, treading the cold snow beneath her feet, on her way to the carriage awaiting her at the end of the garden path.

CHAPTER X.

It was some time that John Akerman remained hovering between life and death, Lady Augusta making frequent inquiries.

But when consciousness returned to him it was Mabel on whom his eyes first rested.

"Where am I?" he asked, for the room all seemed so strange; and then, all at once, it came back to him like the terrors of a dream still hanging around him, the events of the last few weeks, the remembrance of which recalled to him all the agony he had undergone.

"You are with mother, here in Ludlington!" she answered.

"In Ludlington!" he exclaimed. "And you here too!"

And then she told him all that had transpired since that day on which they opened his prison door, and told him he was an innocent man.

"An innocent man!" he laughed, as if he did not know it. "But I am glad the guilty were brought to justice, not so much for my own sake, though it would have been hard to have died on the gallows, but because now you know I did not lift my hand against him."

"And can you forgive me, John," she asked, "for ever having doubted you?"

She was kneeling beside him then, her beautiful eyes upraised to his; but he had no need to speak, for she had felt his hand touching lightly the golden threads of her yellow hair; she had seen the light of love steal over his face; and she knew that, in the intensity of his great affection, he had forgotten the wrong she had done him in the past—had forgotten all but that the one woman he loved above all others was holding within her own the thin hand, where the blue veins showed so plainly, and he was happy.

Beyond lay the Abbey, the bare trees white with snow, stretching out their arms like spectres over its turret towers, on which a bright sun was now shining.

And when, at his request, Mabel lifted him that he might see from the bed where he lay the Ludlington without, he could scarcely realise the truth of his terrible experiences of the last few weeks.

Mrs. Osbrey had called at The Cottage often, more at Lady Augusta's desire than her own wish, for she said she felt she could never forgive Mabel for her deceit, still believing if it had not been for her Bertie would be alive.

"And I suppose she will be marrying him now," she told Marion when, on one occasion, she told her how her poor girl was making up for the way she had treated John by nursing him to life again.

So that when, on this occasion, they saw her portly frame advancing towards The Cottage, Mabel did not care to descend to where her mother was until she had left.

"Is that the housekeeper from The Abbey?" John asked.

"Yes; and the only person, I think, who has not forgiven me," was the reply.

She spoke sadly, but he only smiled as he fell back on the pillows, and then Mrs. Percival entered the room.

"I must go to The Abbey at once," she said. "Lord Devaine has had a fit, and Mrs. Osbrey has come herself for me while the doctor is with him. Lady Augusta is awfully frightened."

Only a few minutes, and Marion was again in the room where, years since, she had taken from Lady Devaine her little daughter; and now on the same bed lay the man who, but for her, would have ignored that daughter's existence.

"I have sent for you, Marion," he said, when, according to his wish, she advanced to where he was, "for I know I shall not be here long. It is useless to tell me to the contrary," he added, addressing the doctor, who would not admit he was right, and then he turned again to Mrs. Percival. "You were a good servant to my wife, a mother to my child, and I sent for you that you might know the land, and all on it, that John Akerman once rented is his, solely and entirely, the day he takes Mabel, your child, to the altar.

"I know all about that," he said, impatiently, seeing on Marion's face what she would have told him. "That is all passed, and they will love each other none the less for what they have both suffered. If they do the farm is yours for life, and your daughter's after you. Now, good-bye; I have much to say to others, and there is no time to lose."

He held out his hand then, in the same way as of old, impatient lest she should weary him with thanks; and then, when the door closed behind her, he became exhausted, and those assembled around his bed saw that he was not wrong when he said the end was near.

"I could have wished to have lived that I might have seen your son, Reginald," he said, when holding his nephew's hand at the last; "but it was not to be. Perhaps a punishment, because I rebelled when Heaven denied me one of my own."

And then he could speak no more, only letting his eyes wander from one face to the other of those assembled to witness his last moments.

* * * * *

A year has passed since then, and when the snowdrops bent their white heads over the whiter snow, the bells of Ludlington broke out in joyous peals, for a heir was born to Lord Devaine and Lady Millicent in the Abbey beyond.

But the dead man's wish was not long unregarded, John Akerman becoming the husband of Mabel Percival, and possessor of the farm, which had become dear to him as in those days before, when he had thought to make her its mistress.

But in her happy wedded life there is still a tie between them. Lady Millicent has never forgotten the woman who was mother to her and her foster-sister.

[THE END.]

BUT NOT OUR HEARTS.

—:o:—

CHAPTER VII.—(*continued.*)

"I am glad of that. It would be a pity to destroy it by modern innovations."

"Yes, and Spragg is decidedly of the same opinion. He intends to keep everything as it has been for generations past. You know he has taken all the servants on, and is quite distressed at having to keep a nineteenth century French cook. But he has promoted Mrs. Marshall to the dignity of lady housekeeper; and anyway I think she would not be equal to sending up a dinner turned out as he would require it."

"Hardly," agreed Ruby. "Perhaps, after all, we won't find the new man such a Goth as we fancy him to be."

"I daresay you won't, and you will have to make the best of him, Goth or no Goth."

"I suppose we shall."

"Decidedly. It will be to your advantage to do so."

"What, Paul!" she cried, with a merry laugh, "are you becoming an interested individual, and after years of indifference, suddenly blossoming into a mercenary man, with an eye to the main chance!"

"Circumstances alter cases," he replied sententiously. "When a man has plenty of this world's goods he can afford to be disinterested and careless; when he is one remove from a pauper it behoves him to keep his eyes wide open and not let a single chance slip."

"I see. And you think Washington C. Spragg might give us a chance?"

"I think he might give you a chance, Duchess," he replied pointedly, letting his eyes dwell on her handsome, dusky face.

"Ah, I see," she said again.

"Opal," he continued, patting the little hand that nestled so confidingly against his, "has chosen 'love in a cottage' with——"

"'A man one remove from a pauper,'" put in Ruby, roguishly.

"Exactly so," he assented calmly, giving the white digits he held an extra tender squeeze; "therefore she will not want any chances, as her fate is sealed."

"How do you know she will not?" demanded her sister, daringly.

"I am certain of it."

"Don't be too sure. She may wish to enter the lists, and tilt for the honour of becoming Mrs. Mummy."

"Hardly. What do you say, sweetheart?"

"That I don't want to tilt for anyone but you, Paul."

"And you would fight for me?"

"To the death," she answered, with an energy that was absolutely startling in one so gentle and quiet, while her blue eyes sparkled and glowed showing how intense was the feeling she bore him.

"I hope it will never come to that," he smiled.

"I hope not," said the youngest sister, with a comical grimace. "Just fancy Opal dragging some other woman round the arena by the hair of her head, and finally giving her the *coup de grace* by plunging a great dagger down—down into the depths of the heart that had dared to beat warmly for her own particular private property—Lieutenant Paul Costello Chicherly."

"Don't be absurd," expostulated Miss Vane.

"Where does the absurdity come in? You declare valiantly that you would fight for his lordship 'to the death' and then you abuse me for suggesting that you might dispose of a rival in the way so graphically described by my humble self."

"I did not mean that I would fight in that way exactly."

"Really! I wonder what you did mean! At any rate, I am pretty certain that you would run away or faint if you saw any fighting going on."

"I daresay I should," she acknowledged frankly, "I am a sad coward."

"Quite right, too," said Paul, warmly. "I

like to see a girl soft and womanly, cowardly rather than fearless. The emancipated 'she' of the present day is far too manly and independent to suit the taste of most men. I can do all the fighting, and you may be as timid as you please."

"Bravo!" cried the irrepressible one. "What a well-matched pair you will be! Quite a 'Jack Spratt and his wife' sort of couple—a pattern for all married folk to copy and study. I shouldn't be surprised if you win the flitch of bacon!"

"Neither should I," said Opal, quietly.

"Nor I," echoed Paul, as he rose to go. "We won't have much to quarrel about, for her will shall be mine——"

"And mine yours," she interrupted quickly.

"So you see, Miss Ruby, we may win the flitch and if we do I promise you you shall be asked to dine off it."

"Thanks, I accept the invitation, and hope you will have bread beans as well. I have a weakness for them."

"Certainly. The repast shall be magnificent."

"You will come again soon, Paul?" whispered Opal, as she stood clasped in his arms under the friendly shade of the giant laurels, for the moon was up—round, full, resplendent, and its silvery rays made night as light as day. "Your time is short now. I want to see all I can of you."

"I shall be here directly after breakfast," he replied, promptly. Every day we must spend together now, as my absence must be a long one."

"Yes," she sighed; but he stooped and kissed the quivering lips, and the sigh changed to a smile ere he left her, with a last lingering, fond embrace, to go to the galleried, gable-ended, queer old hostelry.

CHAPTER VIII.

The next two or three weeks were the happiest of Opal's life, and perhaps, too, of her lover's. They put aside all thoughts of the parting that was drawing so near, and gave themselves up to the delight of enjoying each other's society.

Every day they spent wandering about the fair country, walking to the Chines, famed for their picturesque beauty, visiting every nook and corner of the country—he saying adieu, she carrying in her mind pleasant memories of beautiful scenes. Often they would seat themselves on great boulders, and look across the open stretches of honey-scented, heather-clad moorland, almost fancying themselves in Scotland; and talk about their future, weaving bright webs of imagination, picturing perfect bliss in their married life without any of the pains and penalties which fall to the lot of most mortals here below.

They thought those happy hours, spent side by side, were but a foretaste of the lifelong companionship, to come, in which they would go through life "hand to hand, heart to heart," cheering each other by kindly affection, lightening each other's troubles, if any cropped up, smoothing over the rough places they came to, going down the path that leads to the Valley of Death together, meeting the inevitable doom of the whole human race, if not at the same moment, at least without a long interval of separation, and sorrow.

Little they recked that those were their last—their very last—days of sunshine, of innocent enjoyment, of perfect faith, and trust; and that, when they met again, sorrow and shame would have scorched the freshness from the girl's fair cheek, quenched the light from her soft eyes, the joy from her young heart; that between them would yawn a chasm, dark, deep, bridgeless as the grave. They could not lift the curtain which obscures the future, fortunately for them, so they enjoyed to the full the happy present, blessed with youth and health and love.

Meanwhile Mr. Spragg had arrived at Temple Dene, with the French cook, a wonderful fellow, who generally wore a queer, white flat cap, sported a ferocious moustache, a little imperial, and couldn't speak a word of English, accompanied by a small army of scullions.

He apologised profusely to Mrs. Marshall for introducing new material amongst the old, explaining that he feared to throw too much work on the shoulders of the aboriginals—an explanation which was graciously accepted by the *ci-devant* cook, who, magnificent in black satin in the housekeeper's own cosy sanctum, received her new master, and determined to make the best of matters, and keep her promise to "Master Paul."

His dream seemed realised the first evening, as he sat in solitary state at the head of the table, with Benson behind his chair, and Fred in attendance, backed by Plague, Pestilence, and Famine, who brought in the dishes, which, however, were not mediæval messes, but modern French concoctions, equally indigestible, and in some cases far from palatable. Still he took a small portion of each, feeling it was the right thing to do, and that, cost what it might afterwards, he must do the right thing before his servants, who would doubtless severely criticise his behaviour, and contrast it with that of their former master.

So he drank Chablis with his fish, hock with the *entrées*, port with the joint, claret at dessert, and finished up with a tiny glass of chartreuse, simply and solely because Benson offered them to him, and not at all because he wanted or liked them. A flagon of foaming nut-brown ale would really have been more to his taste, with a nip of whisky to finish up with. Still, like a good many other foolish people in the world, he gave up comfort for discomfort, for fear of the adverse opinions of those about him.

The next morning the workpeople arrived from London, and he busied himself for awhile giving directions to the foreman, and urging him to use the utmost dispatch. Then he walked over the estate, round the Chase, visited the farm buildings, his fishery in the Dene, and finally the stables, where Ferrars was occupied throwing down a fresh bed for Bluebell.

"How is the mare gettin' on?" he asked, wishing to ingratiate himself with all his people.

"Nicely, sir. A bit fresh. Yo see, Muster Paul 'e aint rode 'er this last week, and I'm gettin' a bit old for mounting a 'oss."

"I suppose you are," agreed Mr. Spragg, looking at him reflectively. "You will want help in the stables, as I shall keep a good stud. You can choose your subordinates from among the village lads if you like, and I shall make you head-groom, and double your wages, if that will suit you?"

"Thankee sir," responded Jem, somewhat overwhelmed at this liberality, tugging vigorously at his frosty locks, and scraping with his iron-shod boot, "that'll suit me foine, and I knows two or three lads at Dene that'll make smart grooms. May I make so bold as to ask how many I am to 'ire?"

"As many as are necessary," replied his master, carelessly. What did the wages of a stable-help more or less matter to him? "And now will you saddle the mare? I guess I'll go for a gallop."

"Kin—kin you ride well, sur?" ventured Jem, with an apologetic tug at the forelock, "'cos she's mighty fresh."

"Oh, yes, I can ride well enough," replied the American, with a slight smile, and Jem was obliged to acknowledge that he could when he saw him mount and canter down the avenue firm as a rock, horse and man looking like one.

Mr. Spragg enjoyed his ride. The scenery was lovely, the newly-reaped fields looking as if dotted with spun glass, as the stubble glinted and glistened in the steady sunshine. The nuts were browning fast in the woods, the blackberries hung in great tempting clusters on the hedges, the hips and haws reddening, and the dense foliage turning russet and tawny yellow tints.

His quick eye noted everything—the mansions of the neighbours, the cottages of the villagers, the shops of Dene, the gable-ended houses with latticed windows, the post-office which was also a general store, and many other things.

Amongst the other things he observed was a handsomely appointed barouche with a pair of greys, drawn up outside the store, in which was seated a queer-looking little old woman, very richly dressed, talking to a young girl who stood leaning on the door, and whose face was so lovely that he turned back and rode by again to have another look at the deep azure eyes, veiled by ebon lashes, overarched by brows nearly as dark, at the amber hair, delicate complexion, and sweet, mobile features.

"Very pretty creature," he observed to himself. "Wonder who she is? Guess I shall know before long!" and, consoling himself with that reflection, he galloped home, and proceeded to dress for his solitary and stately dinner.

"Fine place," he soliloquised, when the servants had left the room, as he sat toying with a peach, "very fine, but too big for me alone. I shall be lonely by-and-by when the novelty has worn off, even though the county folk do receive me. It won't seem like home unless—unless I have a wife to cheer me. Yes, a wife; that is what I want. A charming, pretty woman, who will make herself agreeable to me and my friends, and who won't marry me altogether for what I can give her.

"I shouldn't like to be married altogether for my money. I should wish for a little love—only a little. Yet, shall I ever get it? I hardly think so. I'm not pleasant to look at," and, with a somewhat dreary laugh, that made him more frightful, he gazed at his unhandsome reflection in a mirror opposite.

"No. If I were like young Chicheely I'd have a good chance; as it is—well, as it is, I calculate the woman won't run after me on account of my comely features," and, with a doleful shake of the head, he went to the smoking-room, and tried to drive away his dismal thoughts by a lavish indulgence in the soothing weed.

Washington C. Spragg was not long left in solitary grandeur. He was too big a fish to be neglected, and a few of the second-rate county people called on him; and one of the first-rate, and that was Mrs. Bevoir, who drove over behind the spanking greys, bringing her husband, a meek little man, and her Transatlantic friend, Mrs. Victoria Davidson, a dashing widow, with her.

Mrs. Davidson, who had every intention of replacing the dear departed Jonathan D. Davidson, if she got the chance, had artfully urged her to be first in the field, saying that it would be such a chance for Arbella, Clementina, and Henrietta (Mrs. Bevoir's three unmarried daughters) to make a brilliant match, and expatiating on the length of his rent-roll, and not giving the smallest hint of her own matrimonial designs upon the man with whom she had had a slight acquaintance in New York during the lifetime of her husband.

The châtelaine of Blacklands fell unsuspectingly into the trap laid for her. She was eager, terribly eager, to marry her three fine, showy girls, and to marry them well, for, having no son, the property passed to a distant cousin, and the style in which they lived did not allow of much, if anything, being saved out of their income. The only chance for her children was a rich marriage, and sedulously she worked for that end.

Bella was engaged to Sir Humphrey Scargill, a neighbouring baronet, with a country seat and five thousand a year, but Lina and Etta were still in the market, and as one was twenty-three and the other twenty-five, it was time they went off; and if a title couldn't be got, why, then, a wealthy commoner, or a fabulously wealthy tradesman—a sort of King Midas—must be taken. So she acted on Victoria Dashwood's suggestion, and paid a visit at Temple Dene.

Mr. Spragg met them with an easy manner that astonished the haughty aristocrat considerably—she having prepared herself for any amount of vulgarity and pomposity—and renewed his acquaintance with Mrs. Davidson cordially; in fact, so very much so that the heart in her plump bosom beat nigh to suffocation with hope that he might aspire to become possessed of her undeniable, but somewhat full-blown, charms, and pay the numerous bills she owed to many long-suffering tradesmen.

But the master of Temple Dene had no matrimonial thought in his mind as far as she was concerned. He was only grateful, sincerely and truly grateful, to her for bringing her friends—one of the best families in the shire—to call on him, thus opening the portals that would admit him to good society, those portals which otherwise must have remained closed to him; at any rate, for a long time. And it was in return for that kindness that he asked her to preside over the tea equipage when it was brought in, and stood beside her while the fat white fingers fluttered about among the Saloplan cups, the veritable cups that Ruby had envied and admired a week or two before.

"Are you satisfied with this place?" ventured Mr. Bevoir, timidly.

"More than satisfied," replied Spragg. "It is everythin' I could wish it to be."

"Yes, I should think so," continued the henpecked little man; "but I noticed some workpeople, and thought you might be having some alterations made."

"Hardly alterations," the other hastened to explain. "Some repairs were needed, and a few modern-antique things required in some of the rooms, so I gave Janson an order to do all that is necessary."

"You are in very safe hands there," said Mrs. Bevoir, with a gracious smile. "He has perfect taste."

"So I understand. I want things to remain as much as possible as they were under the Chicherlys. I think alterations and innovations are a mistake."

"Sometimes," she agreed. "Still, anything would be better than the way Fishlake Chicherly conducted affairs."

"Oh, indeed!" he remarked, not understanding the drift of her observation.

"Young Paul is a fine fellow," said her husband, not wishing a lot of scandal to be imported into the conversation.

"Very fine. A man it is impossible not to like."

"Quite impossible," chimed in the widow, turning her fine hazel eyes up to the ceiling for effect, "and it is equally impossible to help pitying him. 'The sins of the fathers,'" and she shrugged her silk clad shoulders significantly.

"A young man with a marred and ruined future," said the elder lady, decidedly, thinking how much she would have preferred him as a son-in-law to this man with his repulsive face. "We shall miss him very much, and the only good thing that comes from his compulsory departure is that it sends you into our midst as a neighbour," she added, with consummate tact.

"Thank you," replied the American, simply. "You are very kind."

"Not at all," she rejoined, "we shall hope to see a great deal of you, as probably you will be lonely here. There are always young people at Blacklands; come over whenever you feel inclined to do so, and you must promise to come to our wedding ball. My eldest daughter's marriage with Sir Humphrey Scargill takes place on Thursday week. Your card of invitation is on its way, and I trust you will excuse the shortness of the invitation, but as we have only just had the pleasure of making your acquaintance we could not, of course, send it before."

"Of course not," he agreed, readily, "and I shall be most happy to accept it, and your kind general invitation. I have been feeling a little dull and lonely here. I suppose I am not used to the place yet. It may wear out after a time."

"It may. But what you want, Mr. Spragg, is a wife. There is nothing like a wife to drive away melancholy and give a man an interest in life."

"You are right," he responded, with an amount of energy that astonished and pleased both ladies, and only astonished Mr. Bevoir. "It is a wife that I want to brighten my life, and drive the shadows away."

"He means business," thought Mrs. Davidson, as they drove away. "My bills will be paid at last."

"Glad I called," muttered her hostess. "Lina and Esta will have a good chance. The tradesman means to marry."

And on the strength of this she gave them a *carte blanche* to go up to town and order from Madame White the most *recherché* ball dresses she could design, gave each a new suite of jewels, and let them perpetrate unheard-of extravagances in the shape of boots, gloves, and fans.

CHAPTER IX.

The evening of the ball arrived at last, so long looked forward to by many fair ones; amongst others the Misses Vane—Ruby, because she hoped to make an impression on some one of her partners that might ultimately lead to something serious; and Opal, because Paul would be there, and they would be able to spend some precious hours together.

"How do I look?" demanded Ruby, as Paul who was to take them over to Blacklands, came in.

"Magnificent! Quite the Duchess," he replied, half jestingly, for he was astonished at her appearance.

The yellow muslin gown she wore was eminently becoming, the garnets flashing in her black tresses and round her polished throat and arms, heightened the rich hue of her skin. She looked a handsome woman of two or three-and-twenty.

"Now you have seen the sun gaze on the moon," she cried; "and confess for once in a way Queen Luna surpasses King Sol," and stepping aside she disclosed Opal, who was sitting quietly on the rickety sofa, playing with the bouquet of forget-me-nots, and surely a fairer sight never met a lover's eyes. The bright hair was twisted round the little head like a crown, dotted here and there with tiny blue blossoms; the soft muslin robe left the white neck and arms bare, and had for its sole trimming the same flowers that graced her head. Her shapely feet and hands were cased in white kid, and a fluffy, snowy fan hung at her side.

"Shall I do, Paul?" she asked doubtfully, with none of the calm conceit which characterised her sister.

"Hark at her!" laughed the Duchess, "she is sure to be the 'Fairest of the fair;' and she asks if she will 'do.'"

"Yes, you will do, dear," said her lover, quietly, "your dress is extremely pretty."

"I am glad you like it. It was very kind of Aunt Dorothy to give them to us."

"Very kind. What sort of wraps have you?"

"Nothing very fine," replied Ruby with a *moué*. "Only a fur cloak and a woollen shawl."

"Are those enough?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Oh! yes, quite. Opal shall have the cloak and I will take the shawl, and now we had better set off. It won't do to keep aunt waiting, and she is to meet us in the coffee-room, as she doesn't think, dear boy, that it would be quite respectable for us to appear chaperoned only by you."

"And it wouldn't," he declared stoutly.

"Very well, then, we'll go at once, for fear of being late." And she led the way to the ramshackle one-horse fly, owned by the proprietors of the "Blue Dragon," followed by the others, after Paul had whispered "one kiss," and been given what he asked for; and away they went at a slow pace, which was highly displeasing to the Duchess, who was all anxiety to arrive, to see, and conquer.

Lady Dorothy was waiting for them in the dainty morning-room at Blacklands, where tea and coffee were being dispensed, magnificent in brocaded velvet and diamonds.

"Ah! my dears, glad to see you are punctual," she cried, as they appeared, leaning on Paul—Opal blushing, diffident, shy, but very lovely; Ruby calm, cool, and self-possessed, carrying herself in a way that showed plainly she knew she was good to look at. "Well, Lieutenant, I hope your charges have not been troublesome!"

"Not at all," he answered, politely, bowing over the withered claw-like hand extended to him; "quite on the contrary. Their conduct has been most exemplary."

"Humph! that's a lover's verdict."

"And a true one," he rejoined, promptly, a slight flush rising to his frank face.

"That remains to be seen."

"Yes. I formally hand them over to you now."

"Very well. I accept the charge, and I fancy they will prove more troublesome to me than they have to you."

"Probably," he acknowledged. "You will have to find them partners."

"Not much difficulty about that," she said, with a triumphant glance at her fair charges. "The difficulty lies in that they will have too many."

"They will not object to that."

"Possibly not. Girls, do you mean to dirt?" she demanded; abruptly.

"Oh! no, aunt," blushed Opal, looking at Chicherly, as though there was no other man in the whole world for her.

"I daresay I shall if I get the chance," announced Ruby, coolly; "only I don't know much about the noble art."

"You need not distress yourself on that point," retorted Lady Dorothy, drily; "you are one of those who will soon learn. If any gay buck takes you in hand I warrant you'll prove an apt pupil, and know more about it in a short time than your instructor."

"Quite likely," she agreed, with the utmost calmness, "I have always prided myself on the rapidity with which I have learnt anything I took up, to the smallest detail, and I should be sorry to fail now."

"You would, you would!" crowed her antique relative, delightedly, in a thin treble, that resembled the efforts of a young cock to imitate his elders. "You'll do. No signs of failure about you. Before long you'll be a finished coquette, well-versed in all the wiles and tricks that win men's hearts—the sudden blush, the lowered eyes, the melting glance, the quivering lips, the soft hand-pressure."

"No, aunt," she interrupted, "draw the line there, please; I shall leave the hand-squeezing for my admirers to do."

"Bravo! bravo!" laughed her ladyship, and Paul, and even Miss Vane joined in the merriment, for Ruby's handsome face was full of disgust at the mere mention of her doing such a—what she considered—low thing.

"Come," she continued, as the strains of a valse floated down to them, "dancing has commenced. We had better make a move," and she walked slowly off to the ballroom, leaning on Opal's arm, Paul with the Duchess bringing up the rear.

Mrs. Bevoir was standing near the door receiving her guests, and a slight exclamation escaped her lips as her eyes fell on Opal—an exclamation which was echoed in a lower key by the woman at her side, Mrs. Davidson. Both women saw a dangerous rival had been imported into their midst. The dashing widow felt her full-blown charms would appear coarse and commonplace beside the glowing face of the young débutante, and the hostess intuitively knew that her girls would be eclipsed by the extreme beauty of Lady Dorothy's *protegée*, whom she did not recognise. True, she had seen Miss Vane at church, and occasionally passed her in the village with a supercilious nod, but then her face had been shaded by her hat, and her charms concealed by plain, even shabby, attire.

Now all the perfections of her face and figure shone forth undisguisedly, and were enhanced by the simple yet elegant dress she wore, showing that she might defy criticism, though she could not perhaps envy, hatred, and malice, and all their attendant devils.

"Who is this?" demanded the châtelaine of Blacklands, forcing a smile that was a ghastly travesty of mirth.

"My niece, Miss Vane," replied Lady Dorothy, with an introductory wave of the hand, a malicious twinkle in her keen eyes, for she noted the expression on her hostess's face.

"Is it possible! I should never have known her."

"I daresay not. Fine feathers make fine birds. This bird has mostly worn but a ruffled, tossed plumage, and that makes all the difference, you know."

"Of course. Delighted to see you, Miss Vane; and to you, Lady Dorothy, I owe my best thanks for bringing such a brilliant ornament to my rooms."

"Not at all, not at all; and here is another one," chuckled the old lady, presenting Ruby, who caused a second but lesser shock, for her good looks were of a more ordinary type.

"Very charming!" murmured Mrs. Bevoir, nearly fainting with rage to think that two such girls should have been introduced on the very evening that brought the millionaire, of whom she had such hopes, to her house. "Lieutenant Chicherly, extremely pleased that you have come. Let me introduce you to some partners," and forthwith she made him acquainted with Mrs. Davidson, who, liking the look of his fair, frank face, chained him to her side by entering into a brisk conversation with him; and offering him the tiny silver slipper, that did duty for a programme, hanging to her fan, obliged him to inscribe his name therein.

But he cast many glances towards Lady Dorothy and her charges, for the valse was over, and most of the men were crowding around her ladyship, and making most tender and unusual inquiries after her state of health.

"Mother, who on earth is that beauty with the amber hair?" demanded Etta, in a fierce whisper, as for a moment she dropped the arm she was leaning on, and which belonged to that desirable matrimonial *parti*, Washington C. Spragg, Esq., and approached her mother.

"Opal Vane," replied Mrs. Bevoir, almost coldly, for she knew a storm would break over her head later on.

"What made you ask her? She puts us quite in the shade."

"I did not do so. They are Lady Dorothy's friends."

"Horrid old woman. She has done this to spite us."

"Hush," replied her mother, with an apprehensive glance around, for her ladyship was a power in the fashionable world, and rich, so it would not do to offend her. "You are indiscreet. You had better go back and entertain your partner."

"I might just as well save myself the trouble," she rejoined sullenly. "Look at his eyes. They are glued to that Vane girl's baby face. Our chance in that quarter is lost."

Nevertheless she went back and laid her hand with an almost convulsive clutch on his arm again, and led him off to the conservatory, he going with extreme reluctance, for he was dying for an introduction to the lovely girl whose sweet face had been ever before his eyes since they first dwelt on it.

To Opal the whole scene was like a glimpse of fairy-land. The polished floor, slippery as glass, the panelled walls, with their gold moulding, the lace draperies, the rose-tinted lights, the shapely broad-leaved palms, the graceful ferns, the masses of exquisite flowers that were grouped in every available space and corner, the beautiful women, with their rich dresses, flashing jewels, and waving plumes, made up a whole that was brilliant and pleasing in the extreme to the girl who had never before participated in such amusement.

She was quite unconscious that she was the fairest and most remarkable object in the room, and was rather overwhelmed, and not altogether pleased, at the numerous requests for her programme, as she wished to give most of the dances to Paul.

"How many have you kept me?" he asked breathlessly, when at last he extricated himself from the gay widow's clutches.

"I hardly know," she responded, dolefully. "They have taken so many."

"Five have gone already," he announced, scanning the little shoe, and standing before her so that he shut her off from the eager crowd of applicants. "How many may I have?"

"I should like to give you all that are left," she answered, "but aunt made me promise that I would not make myself conspicuous by dancing with you too much."

"May I have six, then?" he queried, muttering something between his teeth which was not entirely complimentary to "aunt."

"Oh! yes," with a shy, upward glance from the deep eyes, that set his pulses throbbing in a very mad fashion.

"This one is not taken," as the band struck up an enchanting air. "I shall have it as an extra?" and without waiting for permission he put his arm round the slight waist, and whirled her away from the circle of admirers, down the whole length of the long room.

"Who is that young lady?" asked Mr. Spragg of Miss Clementina Bevoir, who had taken her sister's place, and was leaning on his arm, and looking unutterable nothings into his eyes, which she was well able to do, as she was nearly as tall as he was.

"Which one do you mean?" she replied, wilfully misunderstanding him, for she had had a few minutes conversation with her sister, and knew that their reign as belles of the county was over; that they were displaced, dethroned by this mere beggar-girl, whom Lady Dorothy had brought into their midst, and that, despite their dashing mien, splendid dresses, and no small share of beauty, for the future they would have to play second fiddle to the lead of this insignificant nobody, who had never been heard of or seen until this most unfortunate evening, when she had appeared and broken forth like a blazing meteor, dazzling all beholders.

"The one in white, with forget-me-nots."

"There are a good many in white. You must particularise the lady you mean better," she responded, envy lurking in her bosom.

"The loveliest girl in the room then," returned the American, forgetting in his anxiety to learn Opal's name that he was doing a most ungallant thing, praising one lady to another, speaking in the superlative case, too, thus adding insult to injury, and producing no end of vinegar in an instant.

"I suppose you mean that little creature who has appeared in society for the first time to-night?" she said, frostingly.

"Yes. I think I heard some one say this was her first dance."

"She is Copeland Vane's eldest daughter."

"Vane—Vane! I wonder where I have heard that name? It sounds familiar to me."

"I wonder too, as they are nobodies, and not mentioned in good society."

"Do they live about here?"

"Yes. At a tumble-down hovel called the Rest," she answered tartly, little thinking she was thus describing his own property.

"The Rest. Let me see, where is that? Near Dene?"

"Yes. Just the other side of the village."

"Then I suppose it belongs to me."

"Does it?" she stammered, having the grace to blush.

"I think so. I bought a place of that name from Chicherly.'

"It used to belong to them."

'Then I am Mr. Vane's landlord," he said, reflectively.

"That is a natural consequence," she observed, with increasing acerbity, "and I can only say that I hope you will get your rent. I am sure they haven't paid any for a long time.'

"I don't mind about that," he observed with a smile. "Twenty or thirty pounds won't make much difference to me."

"No, but if all your places are let to paupers it will."

"All my places are not let to paupers," he replied calmly, looking at her keenly, for he began to wonder what made her so hard and bitter against the Vanes.

"Good thing for you they are not. I should advise you to turn them out as soon as you possibly can."

(*To be continued.*)

THE MOST NUTRITIOUS.

EPPS'S

GRATEFUL—COMFORTING.

COCOA

BREAKFAST—SUPPER.

TOWLE'S PENNYROYAL & STEEL PILLS FOR FEMALES.

QUICKLY CORRECT ALL IRREGULARITIES, REMOVE ALL OBSTRUCTIONS, *and relieve the distressing symptoms so prevalent with the sex.* Boxes, 1/1½ & 2/9 (contains three times the quantity), of all Chemists. Sent anywhere on receipt of 15 or 34 stamps, by E. T. TOWLE & Co., Manufacturers, Dryden St., Nottingham.

Beware of Imitations, injurious and worthless.

KEARSLEY'S 100 YEARS REPUTATION.

WIDOW WELCH'S FEMALE PILLS

Awarded Certificate of Merit for the cure of Irregularities, Anæmia, and all Female Complaints. They have the approval of the Medical Profession. Beware of Imitations. The only genuine and original are in *White Paper Wrappers.* Boxes, 1s. 1½d., 2s. 9d., of all Chemists. 2s. 9d. box contains three times the pills. Or by post, 14 or 34 stamps, by the makers, C. and G. KEARSLEY, 17, North Street, Westminster. Sold in the Colonies.

THERE seems hardly any limit to the age of fish of many kinds. Carp are known to have lived two hundred years and over, while the case of the Russian pike that was caught a few years ago with a gold band round his tail on which the date 1546 was imprinted is well known. There are gold fish that have belonged to one family over sixty years, and do not appear much larger than when originally placed in the aquarium, though they are every bit as lively as ever. In the Royal Aquarium of St. Petersburg there are fish to-day that are known to have been there at least one hundred and fifty years. Some of them are five times as big as when first captured; others have not grown an inch.

NATURE has foreshadowed almost all of man's inventions. The hypodermic syringe with which the physician injects morphine into a patient's arm has its counterpart in the sting of a bee. The tunnel-borer is an adaptation of the work of the teredo, or ship worm. The principle of the balloon is found in certain fishes. The paper-making industry is paralleled in the building of a wasp's nest. In the mechanism of a man's body there are joints and levers similar to those used in engines. The automatic oiling of surfaces which rub together in an engine is on the same plan as the lubrication of joints in our bodies. Man's nervous system resembles the telegraph in its mode of working. The ball bearings of a bicycle or automobile are not so very dissimilar to the ball joints of human hips and shoulders. The principle of the lever was foreshadowed in the long bones of the human body.

THE opal is no longer considered of evil omen by even superstitious people. It has become popular to believe that, instead of ill-luck, the opal carries with it the best of luck and happiness in its highest form. Indeed, it is now considered the token of mutual love, burning brightly in all the colours of the rainbow. It is the gift of lover to sweetheart, the symbol of an eternal devotion, and of so devoted a character as to show itself in constant and fiery flashes of beautiful colour. To emphasise this romantic idea the opal is now cut in the form of a heart, and the sentiment of a heart on fire with love is one which appeals to all lovers. This heart, when small enough, is set in a ring; but Australian opals have recently been imported of sufficient size to permit of their being used in a simple gold frame as a pendant for the lorgnette chain. These opal hearts are also used for the centres of brooches.

FACETIÆ.

"With my arm around you you should fear nothing." "Except gossip," she replied as she gently disengaged herself.

He: "What tiny feet Miss Torso has! Did you ever see anything smaller?" She: "Only her boots."

"Is there any hope?" asked the prospective heir. "None," replied the physician. "Your poor uncle will recover."

Census Taker: "What is your age, madam?" Mrs. Neighbours: "Did the woman next door give her age?" "Certainly." "Well, I'm two years younger than she is."

One: "Have you any idea of the hour?" The Other: "No. I have killed so much time lately that I am ashamed to look a clock in the face."

Old Bullion: "What! You wish to marry my daughter? She is a mere schoolgirl yet." Suitor: "Yes, sir. I came early to avoid the rush."

"We'll have rain this afternoon." "Does the weather report say so?" "No; but those folks next door have gone to the country, and left all their upstairs windows wide open."

"Why did you break the engagement, Ellen? Didn't his love stand the test?" "I didn't try his love, but I had the ring tested and proved that it wasn't a genuine diamond."

Miss Jones: "It seems to me that all the nicest men are married." Mrs. Brown: "Well, dear, they weren't always so nice, you know. They've only been caught early and tamed."

He: "I don't know whether to make a fool of myself playing golf or sit on the hotel piazza and make love to some girl all the afternoon." She: "What's the difference?"

Merchant: "What's the matter with your writing this morning—new pen?" Bookkeeper: "No, sir." "New ink?" "No, sir." "What, then?" "Neuralgia."

Landlord: "I've called to collect the rent." Little Girl: "Please, sir, mamma's gone out, and forgot to leave it." Landlord: "How do you know she forgot it?" Little Girl: "She said so."

Mrs. Brown: "I don't think Miss White will ever marry Mr. Jenks." Mr. Brown: "Why not?" "Oh! She quarrels with him so constantly." "Ah! Perhaps they've been secretly married already."

She: "Our neighbours are dreadfully reserved." He: "Yes?" She: "Yes, we've had our new hat-rack two days now, and not a soul of them has been over to see how much it cost!"

She: "They say that all the world loves a lover. Is it true?" He: "Certainly. You just told me that you loved me, didn't you?" "Why, yes, but——" "Well, I'm your lover, and you're all the world to me. See?"

Mrs. Catterson: "Mrs. Pliter certainly loves her husband." Mrs. Hatterson: "Doesn't she? Why she tells me she loves him so much that sometimes it is a positive effort for her to be extravagant!"

Mrs. Highart (dreamily): "I wish to select a painting for the—the north-west corner of my dressing-room." Dealer (briskly): "Yes, madam. James, show the lady Senat's last marine, 'The Nor'wester.'"

Mrs. Green: "Charles, I was astonished at the way you devoured that salad to-night. You know you always said you detested salad." Mr. Greene: "Yes, love, but I didn't know that there was another way of making it than yours."

"Forgive me, my dear," said the gossip humbly; "but I thoughtlessly mentioned to Mrs. Brown the things that you told me in strict confidence." "There is nothing to forgive," replied the wise woman pleasantly. "It was for that very purpose that I told them to you in strict confidence."

Auctioneer (pot-boiler sale): "Going! Going! Gone! Here, sir, it's yours. Great bargain, sir. The frame alone is worth the price." Connoisseur (ripping out the picture): "The frame was what I wanted."

"A new shoe-lasting machine has been invented," said a machinist to his wife, as he laid down his paper. "Well, John, for gracious sake," replied the good woman, "get half a dozen, and let's try them on the children."

Citizen: "What's up?" Policeman: "Ol'm knockin' fur help an' ringin' fur an ambulance." Citizen: "What's the matter?" Policeman: "Oi just saw two Oytalians smilin' at th' same woman."

Jinks: "To-day I pleased a pretty woman by telling her that a certain red-faced, snub-nosed, bald-headed mortal looked like her." Winks: "Get out!" Jinks: "The red-faced, snub-nosed bald-headed mortal was her first baby."

Heroic Girl: "What has become of that handsome man who cheered so loudly when I rescued the little boy from drowning?" Friend: "He is over there on the verandah, proposing to the girl who screamed and fainted."

Mrs Malaprop: "And then, after all, when I got to the hall the man at the door said, 'Sorry, madam, but you can't get into the hall, without a ticket.'" Mrs. Gabbil: "Gracious, what did you do then?" Mrs. Malaprop: "I didn't know what to do. I was completely *ne plus*."

"My dear child, you really should not eat your pudding so quickly." "Why not, mamma?" "Because it is dangerous. I once knew a little boy about your age who was eating his pudding so quickly that he died before he had finished it." "And what did they do with the rest of his pudding, mamma?"

"Higgins, I've come to you for advice. What ought a man of my capabilities and opportunities to do in order to achieve the greatest success in life?" "Gurney, I wish you had come to me with that question about five years ago. I could have told you all about it then. I was just out of college."

Regular Customer (to waiter): "Your portions are very small to-day. As an old customer, I generally have two slices of beef, and to-day you have brought me only one." Waiter (with a look of surprise): "By the powers, but you're right! The cook must have forgotten to cut it in two."

She (to elderly suitor, a widower): "I might consent, but papa would never hear of it in the world." He (haughtily): "Why not? I——" She: "Oh, a foolish little grudge of his. He says you declined to accept him as a son-in-law when he wanted to marry your youngest, and now he——"

"No; he'll never propose," she said, with a sigh. "Why do you say that?" asked her dearest friend. "We went rowing in the moonlight last evening, and he rowed and rowed and rowed." "Never let the boat drift at all?" "Never once." "Oh, well, in that case I should say he hasn't sense enough to be worth having."

"What is an anecdote, Johnny?" asked the teacher. "A short funny tale," answered the little fellow. "That's right," said the teacher. "Now, Johnny, you may write a sentence on the blackboard containing the word." Johnny hesitated a moment and then wrote this: "A rabbit has four legs and one anecdote."

Agent: "I have called, sir, to show you our new patent cash register which I am introducing—prevents all peculation, sir! makes it utterly impossible for any clerk to steal a halfpenny." Mr. Slowgo: "Don't want 'em." "You don't?" "No, sir. My neighbour next door put in one o' them things last Monday, an' before night the hull staff had struck for higher wages."

Mr. Grumps: "I'd just like to know what good all these cooking-school lessons are doing our daughter." Mrs. Grumps: "Everything she cooks she brings home." "Yes, and none of the family will touch 'em, and the things are just thrown away." "No they are not. She gives them to tramps." "Huh! What good does that do?" "We are getting rid of the tramps."

Fuddle: "You know Stocks, don't know?" Doctor: "Yes, indeed. He is now a patient of mine." Fuddle: "Pretty wideawake man, isn't he?" Doctor: "I should say so. I'm treating him for insomnia."

"John, dear, I can't wait to tell you what I am going to buy you." "Darling, what is it?" "Well, I am going to get you a silver card-tray, a bronze Hercules for the mantelpiece, and a new Persian rug." "Now, what are you going to get me?" "Hem! I've been thinking, Jane, of a new shaving-brush."

"Wouldn't you like to see an era dawn in human existence when all will be perfection," asked the amiable but visionary citizen; "a time when there will be no more suffering or suspense or pain of any kind?" "I don't know," was the hesitating response. "I wouldn't like to hang back in any philanthropic scheme, but self-preservation is the first law of nature, you see. I'm a dentist."

"What's this?" exclaimed the young husband, referring to the memorandum she had given him, "One dozen eggs, one pound of raisins, bottle of lemon extract, a tin of ground cinnamon, and half a pound of sugar. What do you want with all those things, Belinda?" "I've got a stale loaf," replied the young wife, "that I'm going to save by working it up into a bread pudding. I never let anything go to waste, Henry."

"I think we ought to give this wedding a display-head on the first page," said the City editor. "Out of the ordinary, is it?" asked the managing editor. "Well, I should say it was," answered the City editor; "why, there was no 'bower of roses,' no 'floral bell,' no 'wide-spreading canopy,' no 'blushing bride,' nothing 'beautiful in its simplicity,' no 'solemn strains' to the wedding march, no——" "Enough!" cried the managing editor; "double-lead it and give it a scare-head; it's the only one of the kind."

A country vicar met a parishioner, and asked him the usual question: "Weel, John, how are you to-day?" "Gey weel, sir, gey weel," replied John cautiously, "if it wasna for the rheumatism in my right leg." "Ah, weel, John, be thankful; for there is no mistake, you are getting old like the rest of us, and old age does not come alone." "Auld age, sir!" said John. "I wonder to hear ye. Auld age has naething to do with it. Here's my ither leg just as auld, and its quite sound and soople yet."

The other morning Jones turned up at the office even later than usual. His employer, tired of waiting for him, had himself set about registering the day's transactions, usually Jones's first duty. The enraged merchant laid his pen aside very deliberately, and said to Jones, very sternly indeed, "Jones, this will not do!" "No, sir," replied Jones, gently, drawing off his overcoat as he glanced over his employer's shoulder, "It will not. You have entered McKurken's order in the wrong book. Far better to have waited till I came!"

"My dear," said a gentleman to his wife, "where did all those books on astronomy in the library come from? They are not ours." "A pleasant little surprise for you," responded the lady. "You know, you said this morning that we ought to study astronomy, and so I went to a bookshop and bought everything I could find on the subject." It was some minutes before he spoke. "My dear," he then said slowly, his voice husky with emotion, "I never said we must study astronomy. I said that we must study economy."

"Do you spell 'dog' with a capital D?" asked old Mr. Tonsleton, looking up from his desk. "If it's your dog—the big black-and-white one, that was loose last night, yes," replied the junior book-keeper, who was standing up, writing at a desk six inches too high for him, "spell it with the biggest D in the alphabet." And he went on with his work, while the old man sat and looked at him over his baleful spectacles for nearly ten minutes, wondering if he knew what the young man meant, and thinking he would ask his daughter Evelyn about it when he got home.

SOCIETY.

It is certain that the betrothal of the young Duke of Saxe-Coburg will be speedily urged so soon as that age is reached. The Queen is specially anxious that the Ducal throne should not be occupied by any other branch of the Saxe-Coburg family.

The late Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha was the most all-round sportsman of the Queen's family. He was fond of both shooting and fishing, and in his old sailor days, whenever he had the opportunity of going ashore, his rod and gun were brought into requisition at the earliest moment.

The widowed Queen of Italy is devoted to her daughter-in-law, although at first she was not in favour of the match. Queen Helen is a most fascinating personality. She speaks four languages, plays both piano and violin, is a dead shot, loves the sea and also mountain climbing, and has made her husband's life so happy that Queen Margaret loves her as a dear daughter.

The Princess of Wales and Princess Victoria are at Copenhagen, on a visit to King Christian at the Château of Bernstorff for seven or eight weeks. The Princess of Wales greatly enjoys the annual family reunions in Denmark, and, as the King is over eighty, never likes to miss one. On their return their Royal Highnesses may go to Scotland to stay for a time at Mar Lodge, which they also greatly enjoy.

The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse will pay a visit to the Queen this month. Prince and Princess Francis Joseph of Battenberg, and Countess von Erbach Schönberg, and the Hereditary Count and Countess will also be Her Majesty's guests on Deeside during the autumn. The Hereditary Countess von Erbach is the youngest sister of the Duchess of Albany, and her mother-in-law, Countess von Erbach, is the only sister of the late Prince Henry of Battenberg.

The Duke of York is said to be exceedingly clever with his pen and pencil, and occupies many of his spare moments in sketching. His Royal Highness is an exceedingly smart caricaturist, and revels in caricaturing all the various people whom he is called upon to meet. These caricatures, however, are all of the happiest and kindest character, and although he may show them to a few of his own personal friends, they are invariably quickly destroyed after having been completed. One of the best pen-and-ink portraits of the Duchess of York was that done by the Duke himself some months before they were married.

The King and Queen of Greece live in very simple style, cheerfully adapting themselves to the pecuniary circumstances into which their country has fallen, and it is a well-known fact that their Majesties often take a tram when they want to run down to Athens. The Queen is quite an accomplished yachtswoman, and is an honorary admiral of the Russian Navy. The King, by the bye, is probably one of the most prolific letter writers amongst the crowned heads of Europe, and it would be readily guessed that his favourite correspondent is the Princess of Wales.

The Duchess of Fife not only holds the record as the most successful lady angler on the Dee, but she is unique in being somewhat original in her manner of angling and in the selection of her tackle. She uses a cane-built rod—as also does the Duke of York, but of a somewhat stiffish build—casts a short but straight line, and gives little law to the somewhat coloured but otherwise game beauties she finds plentifully enough in her pools at Mar Lodge in the early days of September. Her hooks are dressed to her own special directions by Garden, of Aberdeen, and it is needless to say that the "Mar Lodge"—the most popular salmon fly in the North of Scotland—finds a conspicuous place in her fly-book.

STATISTICS.

London has 6,102 physicians; the provinces, 15,794; Wales, 1,127; Scotland, 3,462; Ireland, 2,559.

Thirty-five kinds of mosquitoes are known Europe; three hundred in the world; and nine in Great Britain.

There are 7,000 farms in the Orange River Colony. These are in included in an area of 7,200 square miles.

GEMS.

Human nature has a much greater genius for sameness than for originality.

Evil thoughts swarm only in unoccupied minds. Be busy about noble things if you would be saved from the ignoble.

Affectation is the confession of inferiority. It is an unnecessary proclamation that the individual is not living the life he pretends to live.

Courage, activity, and earnest perseverance are indeed the secret of all success. Good endeavours strenuously persisted in, seldom fail; they nearly always lead to success in the long run. Powers of even the most mediocre kind, if energetically employed, will effect a great deal.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

Venetian Sandwiches.—Grate the rind of a lemon, remove the pulp and squeeze out the juice. Mix this with two ounces sugar, a little butter, and a beaten egg. Roll out some short paste, spread with this mixture, place a piece of pastry on the top. Wet the edges and pinch together. When cold cut into strips one inch wide, sift sugar over, and send to table on a folded serviette.

Vegetable Marrow Preserves.—Very delicious marmalade can be made from vegetable marrows. First pare (thickly) and core the marrow, then slice it and lay it on a dish. Cover it with sugar, allowing three-quarters of a pound to a pound of fruit. To every two pounds of fruit add the grated rind and the juice of a large lemon. Place all in a preserving-pan and boil till the fruit is clear, about three-quarters of an hour. This method, with the slight alteration of adding ginger flavouring, results in a delicious preserve.

Filleted Kippers on Egg Toast.—Pass the yolks and whites of two hard boiled eggs through a sieve, pound them to a smooth paste with a little butter, and season with salt and pepper. Put a tiny piece of butter into a small saucepan, and when it is hot stir in the egg mixture. Cut some wide strips of hot buttered toast, spread them with the egg mixture, put them into the oven, cover them with buttered paper, and keep them hot. Take filleted kippers which have been soaked in milk for ten minutes, dry them on a cloth and fry quickly. Place one fillet on each strip of toast, pour butter over it, sprinkle with parsley.

Boiled Haddock with Maître d'Hotel Sauce.—Boil the fillets taken from a fresh haddock in salted water, to which a small quantity of vinegar has been added. When they are cooked take them carefully from the water and drain them on a hot cloth. While the fish is cooking, make about half a pint or more (according to the number of fish used) of melted butter sauce; season it with salt, pepper, and a dash of cayenne, and stir in a tablespoonful of finely-chopped parsley and two teaspoonfuls of lemon-juice. Dip the fillets into the sauce to mask them lightly, and arrange them so that they just overlap each other lengthways, down a hot dish, and pour the remainder of the sauce round the fish.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Grasshoppers form one of the very finest baits for trout or grayling.

Most kinds of clay contain a considerable proportion of iron; the red colour of the brick, for example, is due to the presence of oxides of iron.

The edible snail, brought to England originally by the Romans, may still be found in and near Silchester, the ruins of one of the most famous Roman cities in Britain.

Horses, giraffes, and ostriches have the largest eyes of all terrestrial animals, but among marine animals there are cephalopods, or ink fishes, which have eyes as large as a plate.

In Cairo, Egypt, a wedding ceremony is followed by three days of feasting and jollification. It is not considered good form for guests to leave while the festival continues.

All effort to ascertain the depth of the famous Pitch Lake of Trinidad has been unsuccessful. At the sides of the lake the pitch is hard and cold, but at the centre it is hot, and almost constantly boiling in a liquid state.

The average velocity of the tiny fleecy clouds of the upper atmosphere is about eighty miles an hour; while in winter they have sometimes been known to travel at the rate of 200 miles an hour. They are composed of ice-dust.

Very few ants have stings like wasps or bees. The pain they cause you is by biting with their vice-like nippers or pincers, and injecting through the wound thus made a drop of an acid they are able to secrete.

One of the striking natural curiosities of America is that known as Marshall's Pillar, located in Fayette County, Va. It is an impressive mass of rock rising in column form to a height of 1,000 ft., and is an object of great interest to tourists.

It is interesting to remember just now that the khaki tree may be seen growing in the Italian Riviera. Originally it came from Japan, but it is now largely cultivated by the growers along the Mediterranean coast. The tree—Diospyros khaki—grows to a fair height, and yields a pleasant reddish-yellow fruit.

At Mascali, near the foot of Mount Etna, is to be seen the largest tree in the world. Its trunk is 204 ft. in circumference. The largest tree in the United States is said to be the gigantic tree near Bear Creek, on the north fork of the Tule River, in California. It measures 140 ft. in circumference.

An electrician of Clousenburg, Austria, claims to have invented an electrical apparatus which enables a person to sit in a dark room and behold a scene in another part of the town, regardless of intervening structures. He asserts that his instrument transmits light waves, just as sound waves are transmitted by a telephone.

Female barbers are quite numerous in Austria, but are required by the Barbers and Wigmakers' Union of Vienna to pass an examination before going into business. A properly certified woman must have a knowledge of and pass an examination in shaving, hair-cutting, hair-curling, and wig-making. Poor persons and others who are frugal serve as subjects for experiment.

A new material for the use of builders has recently been introduced in Norway. It is a paper, or pasteboard, which, with asphaltum, is pressed into a solid plate, forming a very serviceable material for covering walls and ceilings. It is damp proof and is a non-conductor of heat, so that it will keep a room warm and comfortable, while at the same time it deadens noise and prevents the harbouring of vermin. It is solid, but can be easily bent so as to conform to all the angles and projections of a wall without breaking or cracking. It is very suitable for panelling, and is even cheaper than the thin boards usually employed for this purpose. It is without odour, and will never decay.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A F.—We know of no such word.

BEE.—Any bookseller will supply you.

PARIS.—July 16th, 1900, was a Monday.

GRAY.—Large wholesale drapers sell them.

ANXIOUS.—Yes, it would be better to do so.

RUTH.—No, you must give six months' notice.

ALF.—No, it needs machinery and special training.

M. B.—You ought, certainly, to marry in your own name.

DOUBTFUL.—No, but you would be justified in trying to do so.

L. R.—It depends entirely upon your own your capacity and inclination.

R. S.—Yes, the sanitary inspector will give you all the necessary information.

WORRIED.—You need not be anxious at all. He has no claim upon you of any kind.

PET.—Lord Russell was a Lord Justice of Appeal before being Lord Chief Justice.

E. G.—We should advise you to employ a respectable solicitor. First, however, get a copy of the will.

J. B.—When clothing gets wet it should be dried far from the fire, as if it dries quickly, it is apt to shrink.

KATE.—Clothes may be ironed much more easily when they have been damped and folded several hours.

FRANK.—All the applications mentioned are useless; if the razor will not produce a growth then the case is hopeless.

CARRIE.—Silk should never be brushed in the ordinary way, only with a clothes brush tightly covered with crape.

CLAIRE.—We must refer you to the shipping advertisements in the daily and weekly newspapers for the information you require.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—It is a village near the Mersey in North Cheshire, about two and a half miles south-east of Warrington.

CONSTANT READER.—A tablespoonful of turpentine put into the water in which clothes are to be boiled whitens them considerably.

DORA.—Twenty words would be rapid longhand, eighty of shorthand letter-writing speed, 120 to 160 words moderate reporting rate.

DISTRESSED.—A great many elementary disorders of the skin are due in great measure to want of exercise, and an over-abundant or a faulty diet.

ELSIE.—Dishes, to shine brightly, should be washed first in suds, and then dipped in clear hot water and left to drain. They require little or no drying.

R. R.—A signalling heliograph is an instrument used for telegraphing by means of sunlight flashes. The name is derived from the Greek word helios, the sun.

HOUSEWIFE.—Carpets should be beaten on the wrong side first, and afterwards more gently on the right side, and should never be relaid until the floor is quite dry.

HETTY.—An action for breach of promise of marriage cannot be maintained against a minor; neither can he, when of full age, be sued on a promise made during his minority.

S. L.—If of good quality it will keep well, but there are many inferior stuffs made up and sold under the name. When these are employed you cannot expect much from them.

BUDDY.—Dip the brush into paraffin oil and then into emery powder, and brush well till all the rust is gone; polish with a piece of dry wash-leather, finishing off with a soft rag.

S. F.—Flannels should not be washed very often. Change the garments frequently, and air those taken off in the open air and sun. Unless they are really soiled do not wash them.

GERTRUDE.—Finely mince them up and stew in butter with a seasoning of cayenne and mace according to taste, or season with salt and a very little cayenne, and serve very hot on toast.

NELLA.—Put the soiled glove on the hand. Take a cake of white soap, dip it in cold water. Take a piece of fine white flannel, rub it on the damp soap, and rub lightly over the soiled glove.

A MARTYR.—Open the window or windows wide and hang wet cloths or a wet sheet before them. The water goes off in vapour, absorbing the heat, and thereby lowers the temperature.

SLAVEY.—Every night boiling water in which a little soda has been dissolved should be poured down it; this will remove any material from the sink, and prevent the pipes getting clogged with grease.

CLEMENT.—To become an actor it is requisite not only that you should possess good natural abilities, but that you should be tolerably well educated, which, from your letter, we can see that you are not.

WINNIE.—First rub with bathbrick and paraffin till all stain is removed, and polish with dry brick. Then rub a little unsalted lard well into the bright parts, afterwards cleaning with a duster till all greasiness is removed. Irons cleaned in this way will not rust.

S. L. R.—Take a handful of blackberry leaves and put them in a teacup, and fill with boiling water; let it stand for ten minutes, then draw off, and when cold drink a wineglass full two or three times a day.

INTERESTED.—Girton is the oldest woman's college in England. It was started in 1869 by five students who determined to try the Cambridge University examinations. At Girton the girls have two rooms each.

ANXIOUS ONE.—If the man was already married to another when he went through the ceremony with second, it was a meaningless proceeding, with no binding effect on her; she is therefore free to marry again when she thinks fit.

C. M.—A mother having three sons in the Army is not entitled to any grant, but it has frequently happened that when the fact has been brought under the notice of Her Majesty she has been pleased to make some gift.

JANET.—When doing plain sewing, if you have a little flour in a saucer, and dip your fingers in occasionally, the hands will be kept free from damp, and the work will be beautifully clean on the hottest day, without washing so often as many people do.

BUSY BEE.—Brooms may be toughened by dipping them once a week in boiling soapsuds. This makes them pliable, but tough. Thus treated they do not cut a carpet, they last much longer, and for a long time sweep like new brooms.

LAURA.—Nothing is better than the old-fashioned paste of turpentine and brickdust. See that the latter is finely scraped, so that it will not scratch. Make it into a thin paste with turpentine, rub with this till all stains are removed, and polish with dry brick and a soft duster.

D. S.—Mix together three tablespoonfuls of castor oil, one of glycerine, and one of turpentine; rub this preparation into the back part of the rug and let it remain for a week, then rub it with a smooth stone or block of wood. Wipe thoroughly before placing on the floor.

IF I CAN LIVE.

If I can live
To make some pale face brighter and to give
A second lustre to some tear-dimmed eye,
Or e'en impart
One throb of comfort to an aching heart,
Or cheer some wayworn soul in passing by;
If I can lend
A strong hand to the fallen, or defend
The right against a single envious strain,
My life, though bare,
Perhaps, of much that seemed dear and fair
To us of earth, will not have been in vain.
The purest joy,
Most near to heaven, far from earth's alloy,
Is bidding cloud give way to sun and shine;
And 'twill be well
If on that day of days the angels tell
Of me, she did her best for one of Thine.

M. G.—Late hours, especially for those under middle age, impairs the vigour of the constitution, and lack of sleep entails a variety of ailments, the appearance of which may not be markedly perceptible for a long time.

CECIL.—Speaking slowly and deliberately is the best remedy for stuttering. It generally happens that one or two letters are more difficult than others for the stammerer to sound. Let these letters be practised; use those words frequently in which they occur, and do not be discouraged by frequent failure.

FUSSY.—Carbolic acid is the cheapest disinfectant you can use. Allow ten ounces liquid carbolic to three gallons of water. Pour about half a pint down each pipe, and bottle remainder for use as required. All pipes should be disinfected at least once a fortnight during hot weather.

A. H.—The laundry people are responsible in the full value of the articles belonging to you which they have lost, but it is difficult to get blood from a stone, and though decree may be had against the parties in Small-Debt Court, you might not find anything of theirs to arrest under it.

CLARENCE.—It has been asserted that should the present Prince of Wales come to the throne, he will reign as Edward VII., not as Albert I. Those in high places consider that the perpetuation of a name which has already been borne by six kings of England would be far more popular than the assumption of a new one.

FRANCINE.—Rub them before heating on a board on which scraped bathbrick moistened with paraffin or turpentine has been spread. Keep rubbing till they look bright and clean, then scrub in hot soapsuds, pour boiling water over and dry thoroughly. If they feel at all rough after this, rub them with fine emery paper.

TOMMIE.—First brush off all dust. Then dissolve a piece of gum arabic about the size of a very small nut in three tablespoonfuls cold water. The best plan is to put this soaking overnight. Brush the hat well over with this solution, being careful that the brush penetrates to every part. Hang in a cool place till dry.

G. W.—Make a strong suds of soap and warm water. Wash the garments in this, then wash in a weak suds, and finally rinse in warm water. When nearly dry press on the wrong side. It is a great improvement to the garment to brush it with a stiff clothes-brush after it has been ironed, brushing it in the way of the nap.

NANCY LEE.—Wash the straw hat first with warm soap and water, using brush, rinse with cold water, then have spoonful of salts of sorrel (oxalic acid, from chemist) in clean basin, pour enough water in to cover hat; put in hat or bonnet, hold it down for five minutes with a stick, take out and dry in sun or before fire.

BUSY BEE.—Butter a pudding basin, put two tablespoonfuls of jam at the bottom. Beat together four eggs and a pint of milk, strain them. Put half a pound of flour in a basin, pour in the milk and eggs gradually, stirring well to prevent lumps. Pour the batter into the pudding basin, cover with buttered paper, and boil quickly for an hour and a quarter. Turn out and serve at once, or the pudding will become heavy.

W. K.—Mix together two tablespoonfuls fine salt, four tablespoonfuls vinegar, and add a bit of common washing soda about the size of a small nut. Put this in the bottles, shake till all the stains are off, and afterwards rinse with cold water and drain. The same cleaning mixture can be used for several bottles. If they are very badly stained, you may have to use this treatment several times before they are really clear and bright.

VIVIENNE.—A four-sided lantern in the form of a street lamp, decreasing in size towards the bottom, is more easily covered than one of any other kind. Obtain a wire frame, then cover the four sides carefully with silk. You may use crape paper if you like (not crinkly paper). Cut out in black velvet half moons and stars; gum these upon the silk to represent the sky. Flowers, ruches, bows, and ribbons may also be used in profusion.

CONSTANT READER.—Take equal parts of powdered washing soda, pumice powder, and whiting. Work them together into a paste with a little water, then lay the mixture on with a rag, rubbing well and washing off. If that does not succeed it means the stain has got well below the surface, and you must lay on another thick coat on the mixture; leave it on for a day or two, then wash off with washing soda dissolved in warm water.

WORRIED HOUSEKEEPER.—Beetles may be said to be generated in a clay soil or damp situation; they quickly find their way, however, to a warm place, and in domestic kitchens are usually found lurking in crevices behind or under a range; the only cure for them is to go over the house carefully with a stiff putty made of two-thirds plaster of Paris and one-third lime, filling up all crevices in walls and floor, then if Keating's insect powder is sprinkled on the floors where the insects usually run any stragglers will be dealt with in that way.

RIBBONS.—To remove stains from silk or ribbons, apply aqua ammonia with a clean toothbrush. The same fluid is also serviceable for removing stains from any fabric. In cleaning silk, use the ammonia nearly pure, and then lay white blotting paper over the spot and iron it lightly. Upon a wooden table lay a piece of woollen cloth, upon which lay smoothly the part stained with the right side downward. Having spread a piece of brown paper on the top, apply a flat iron just hot enough to scorch the paper. About five or eight seconds is usually sufficient. Repeat until the spot is extracted. Then rub briskly with a piece of white writing paper. If time is not an object, sprinkle pulverised French chalk upon the spot; put the article in a dark place, and in a few days the grease will entirely disappear. This is the best for silk of a delicate tint, as the heat of the iron sometimes injures the tint.

WHITE SLAVE.—To produce a brilliant or dead black on all kinds of brasswork, take a quarter of a pound of carbonate of copper in about a pint to a quart of clean water, dissolve the carbonate (in the water), and next get about a pint of liquid ammonia; now add the ammonia very quickly to the copper till the precipitate which is formed is redissolved and the solution is ready for work; the articles are cleaned in the ordinary acids. Care must be taken not to add too much ammonia or else the effect is spoiled, and a little more of the carbonate should be added to bring it back. The solution should be made in a crock or enamelled pan and used cold. Some very good results can be obtained if the articles to be blacked have got a small part or ornament in copper soldered on to the brass parts, for when the articles are prepared ready for bronzing and immersed in the solution it will be found that the brass parts are black and the copper parts are a beautifully dark gold colour.

THE LONDON READER can be sent to any part of the world, post-free Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence. The yearly subscription for the Monthly Part, including Christmas Part, is Eight Shillings and Eightpence, post-free.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of any Booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 474 is Now Ready, price Sixpence, post free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LXXIII., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

THE INDEX to VOL. LXXIII. is now Ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.

☞ ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 26, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

. We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

EYES RIGHT! HEAD RIGHT! STOMACH RIGHT! ALL'S RIGHT!

WITH THOSE WHO TAKE

BEECHAM'S PILLS

These renowned Pills are composed entirely of medicinal herbs, and are warranted free from mercury or other poisonous substance. They can harm no one, and may be given to children, or to the aged and infirm, with perfect safety. They cleanse the stomach and bowels and purify the blood; invigorate the whole nervous system, and give tone and energy to the muscles. In the preparation of BEECHAM'S PILLS the most scrupulous care is taken, and the ingredients form the most successful combination that has ever been discovered for the complaints enumerated in this advertisement.

"WORTH A GUINEA A BOX" FOR ALL

Bilious and Nervous Disorders,

Sick Headache, Constipation,

Wind and Pains in the Stomach,

Impaired Digestion, Disordered Liver,

and Female Ailments.

Over Six Million Boxes Sold Yearly.

SOLD EVERYWHERE IN BOXES, 1s. 1½d. (56 PILLS) and 2s. 9d. EACH.

BEECHAM'S MUSIC FOLIO

Beyond contradiction by far the Cheapest and best Collection of Music yet Published.

VOLUME 17 READY SEPT. 1st,

CONTAINING

Rule Britannia. Old England's still the same. Here upon Guard am I. Those Evening Bells. Dreams. Ellen Bayne. Flow on, thou Shining River. Little Coons (Barn Dance). O give to me those early Flowers. Gently glides the rippling River. Manolo Waltz. Gentle Annie. Creole Beat-Song. Drifting. The Morning of Life. Bourse. A Life on the Ocean Wave. Confidence. We all love a pretty Girl under the Rose. Motsor Polka. Think of me kindly. Kiss me, and whisper "Good-night." As slow our ship. Le Papillon. Dream on, young hearts. Wapping Old Stairs. There are kind hearts everywhere. The Harmonious Blacksmith. Here we dwell in holiest Bowers. The Goodwin Sands.

BEECHAM'S MUSIC FOLIO is lithographed from well-engraved plates on stout paper, and edited by an eminent professor of music, thus guaranteeing perfect accuracy. Each volume contains thirty different pieces of music, either old gems or some of the most popular Songs of the day, some of which, being published at 2s., have been included at considerable cost. The Songs have all the original Symphonies and Pianoforte accompaniments in full. A list of the contents of each volume may be had from most Booksellers, or from the Proprietor, post free.

Volume 17, and the preceding 16 Volumes, can be obtained from most Newsagents and Booksellers at TWOPENCE per Volume; or will be sent Post Free for THREEPENCE per Volume, from

The Proprietor of "BEECHAM'S PILLS," St. Helens, Lancashire.

Volume 18 ready Oct. 1.

Set of 17 Volumes, Post Free for 3/4. (Stamps or P.O.)

London: Published by the Proprietor at 26, Catherine street, Strand, and Printed by WOODFALL & KINDER, Long Acre.